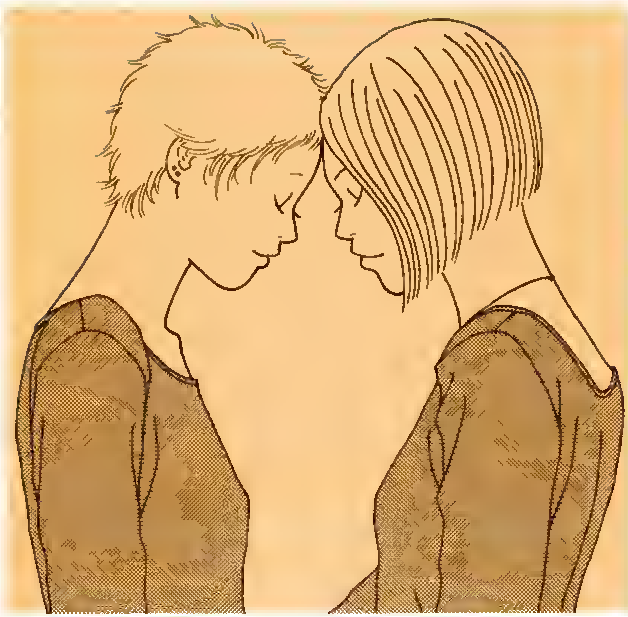
［ラブ マイ ライフ］

LOVE MY LIFE

やまじえびね

ebine yamaji



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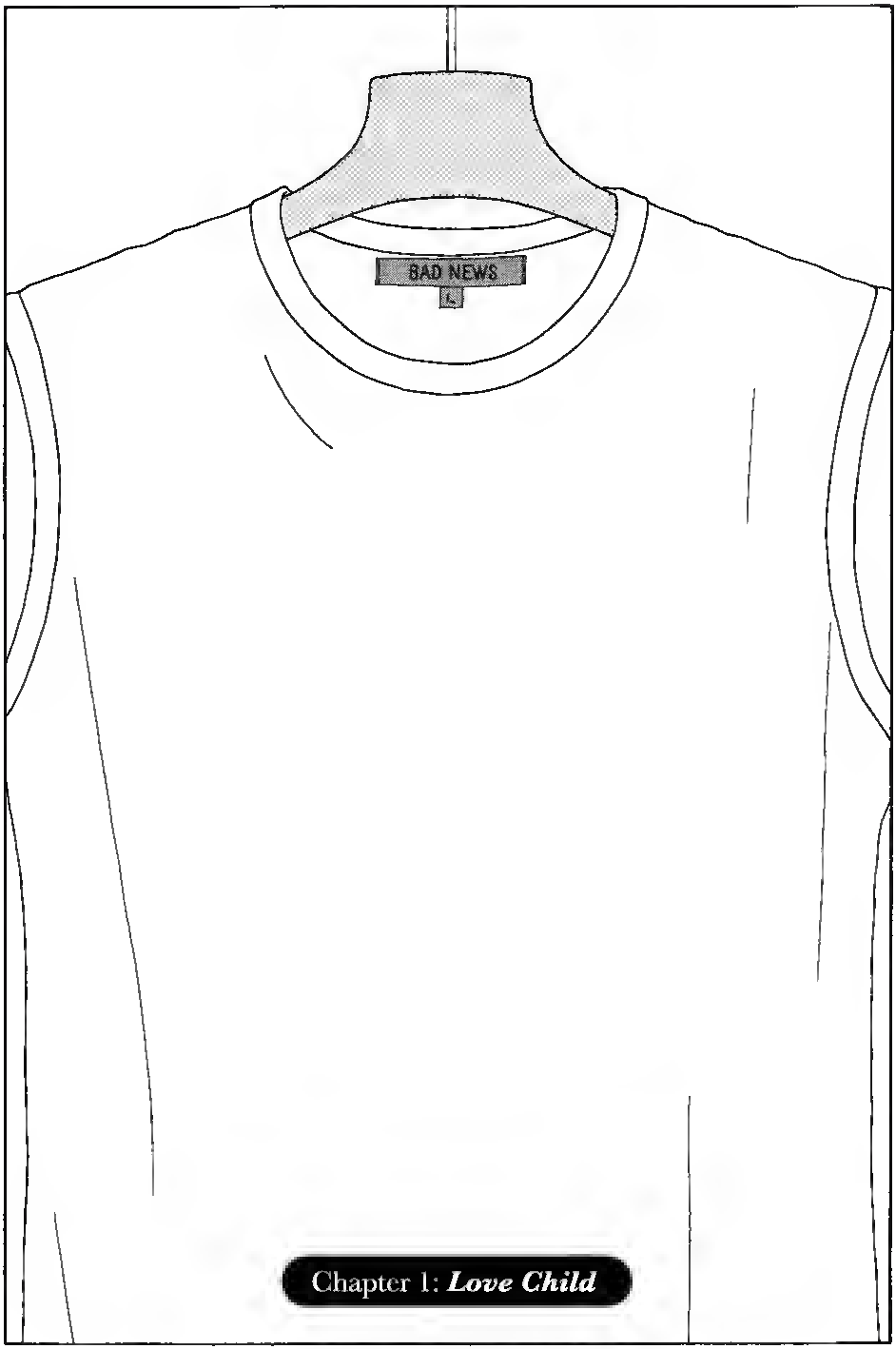
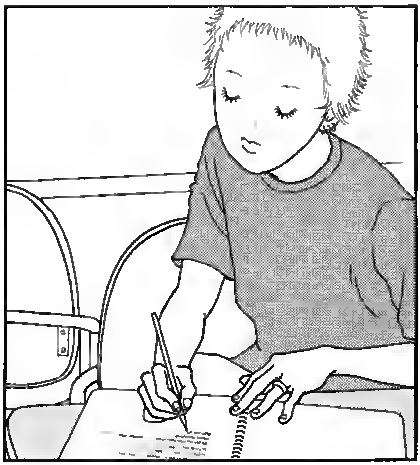


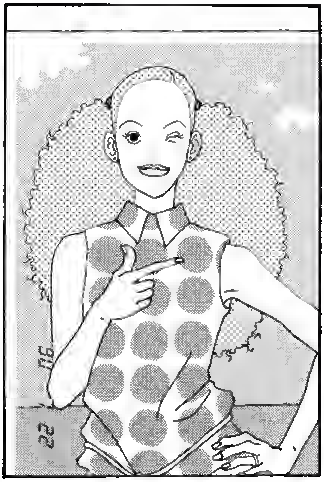
Chapter 1: ***Love Child***

Seven years ago an illness took my mather away ta heaven, so it's been just me and my dad ever since.

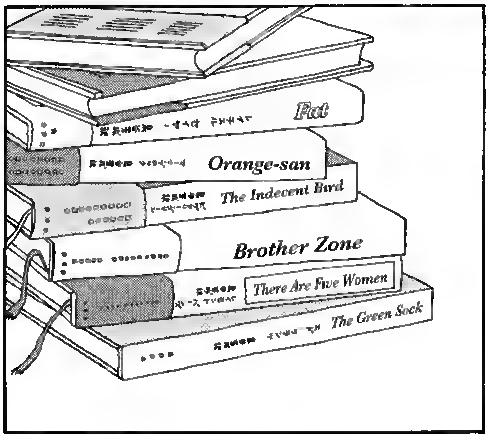


Well, hi there! To the left is me, Ichiko Izumiya, age 18, busy studying at the English language school which I attend.

Ta the right is my favorite picture of my mam. Ta the left is my dad at work.

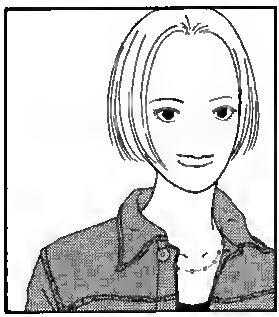


He's a great man who brings many cool novels from the U.S. to Japan!



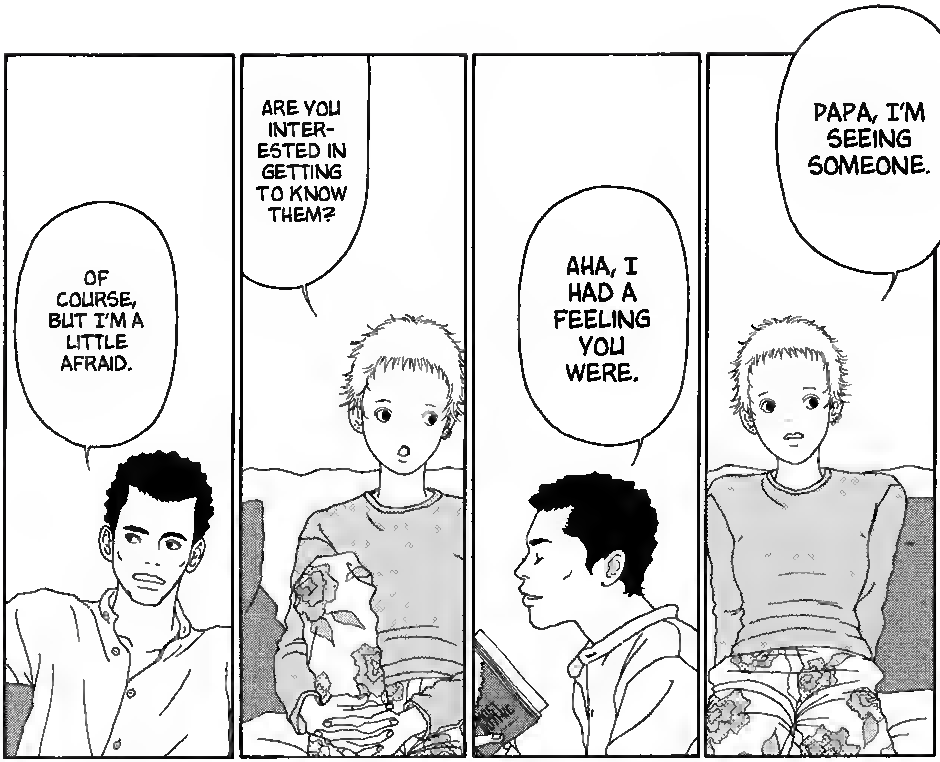
He's a college professor and a translator.

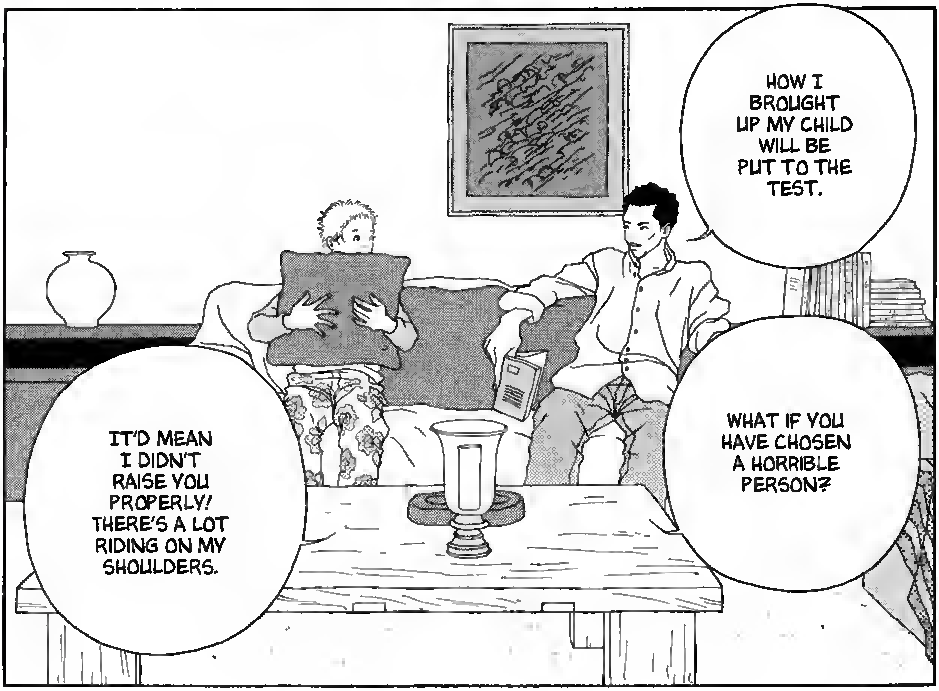
Right now, I have the perfect lover, who I'm madly in love with, and I'm very happy. There's one problem, though. I want to introduce this person to my dad but...

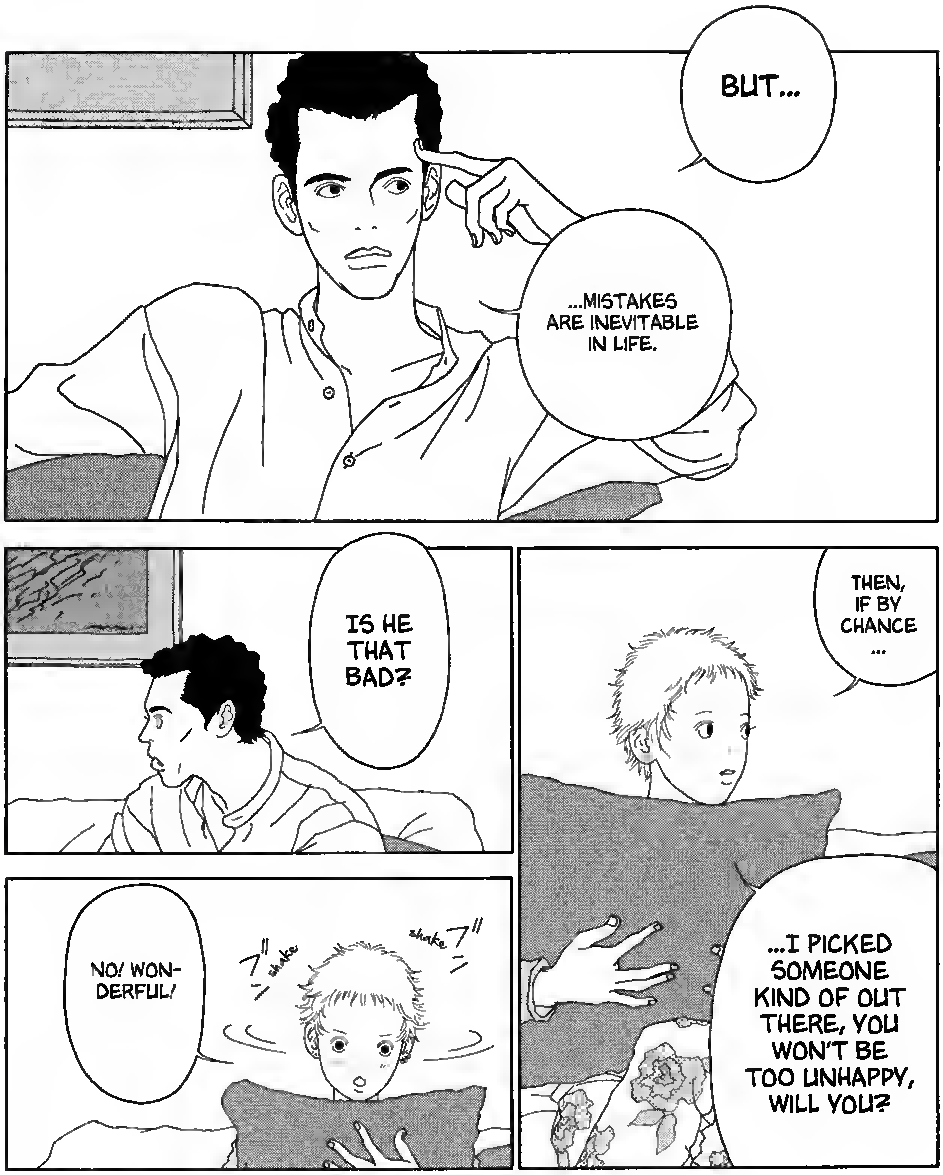


My lover isn't a man.

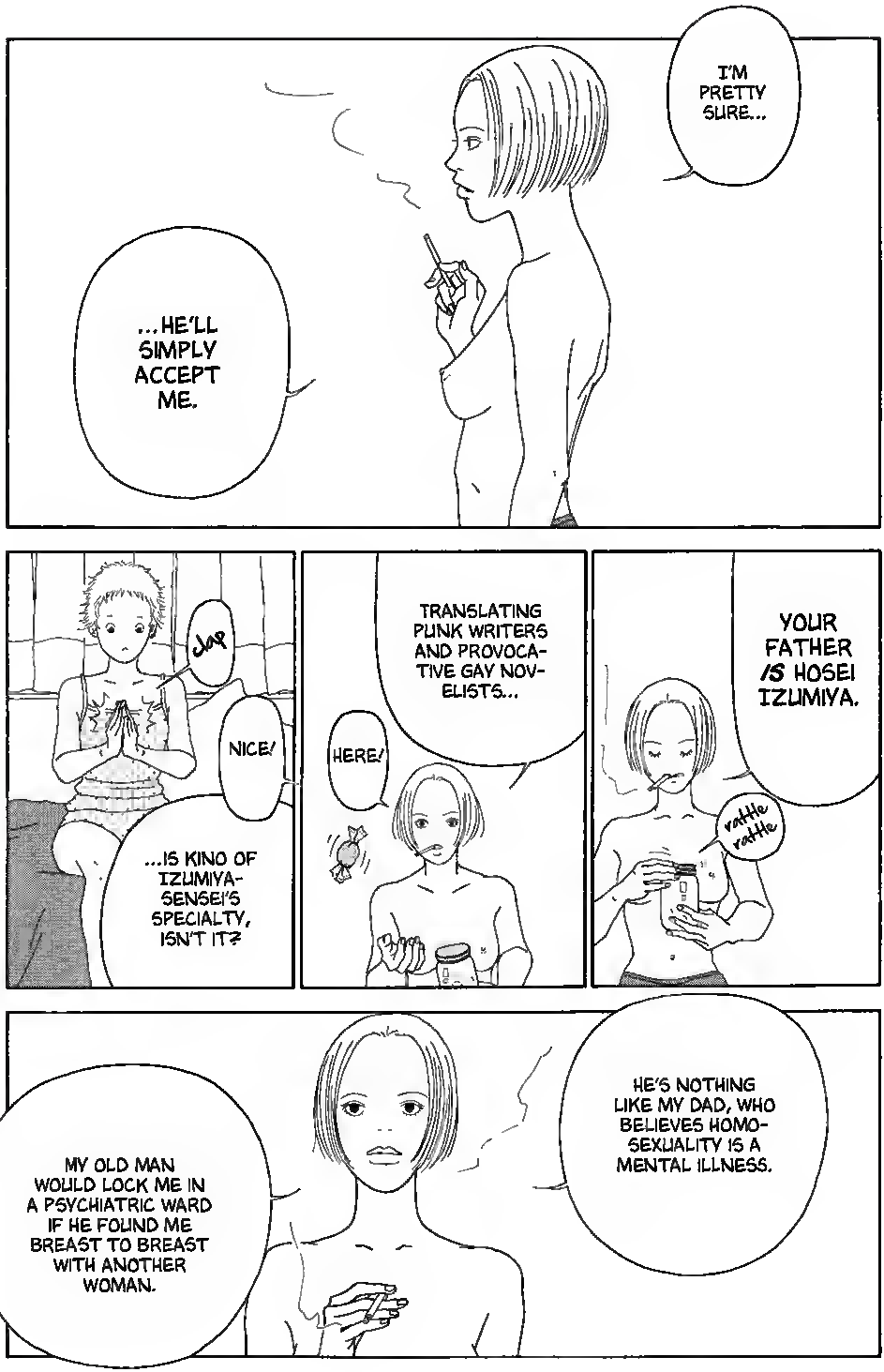
...my lover is Ellie Iyojima, age 21, college student.


PAPA, I'M SEEING SOMEONE.
AHA, I HAD A FEELING YOU WERE.
ARE YOU INTERESTED IN GETTING TO KNOW THEM?
OF COURSE, BUT I'M A LITTLE AFRAID.


HOW I BROUGHT UP MY CHILD WILL BE PUT TO THE TEST.
WHAT IF YOU HAVE CHOSEN A HORRIBLE PERSON?
IT'D MEAN I DIDN'T RAISE YOU PROPERLY! THERE'S A LOT RIDING ON MY SHOULDERS.

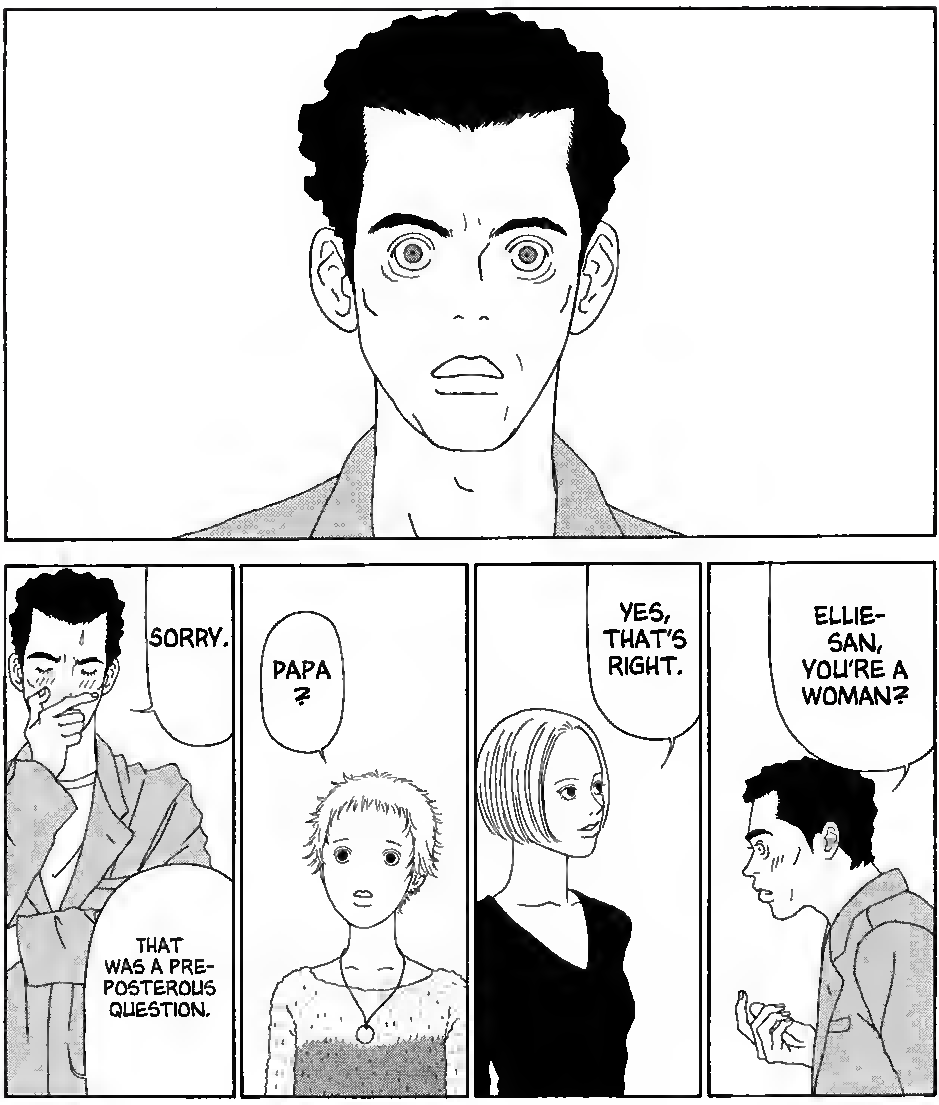

BUT...
...MISTAKES ARE INEVITABLE IN LIFE.
IS HE THAT BAD?
THEN, IF BY CHANCE ...
...I PICKED SOMEONE KIND OF OUT THERE, YOU WON'T BE TOO UNHAPPY, WILL YOU?
NO! WONDERFUL!
shake
shake

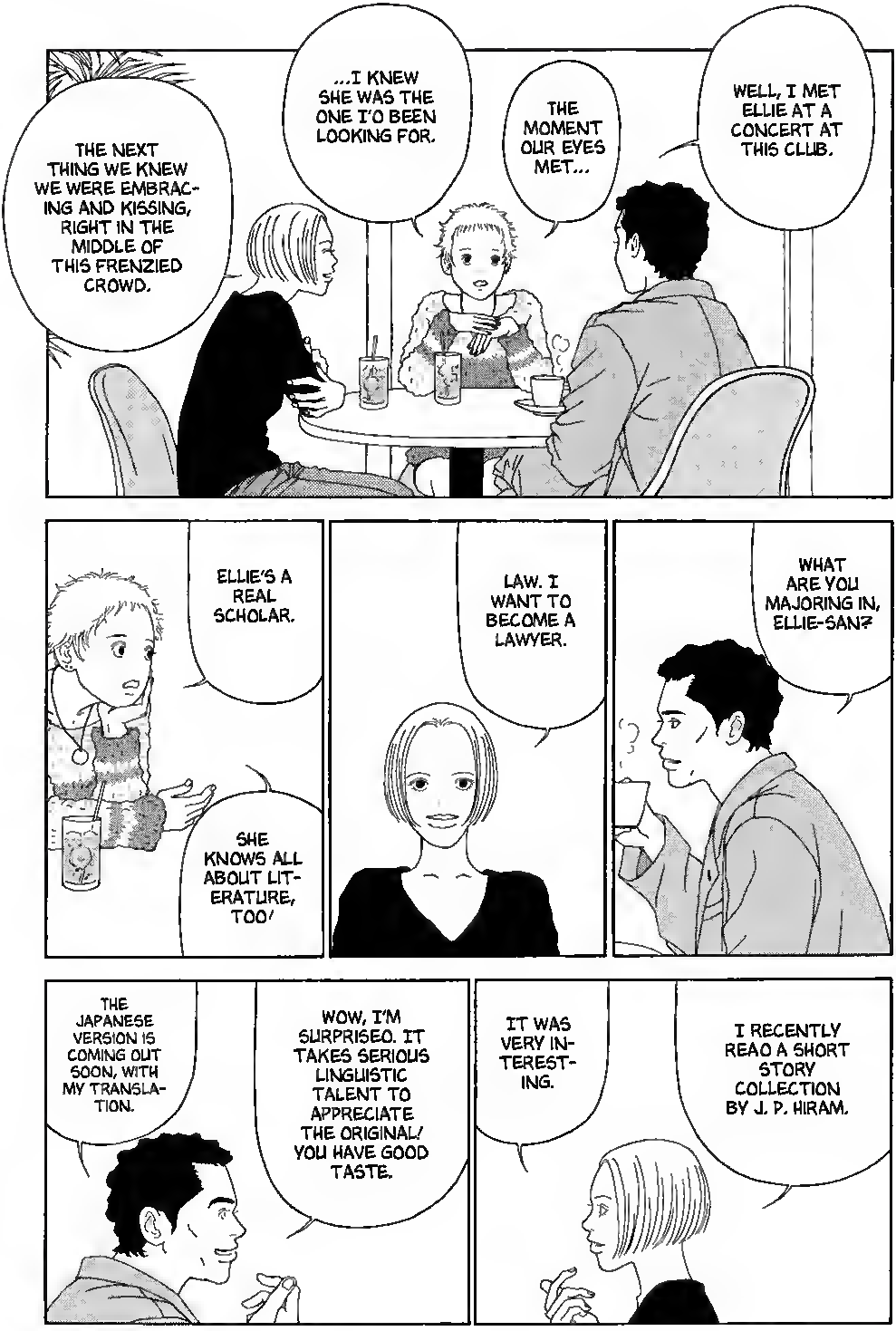
But how will he perceive you? What do you think, Ellie?

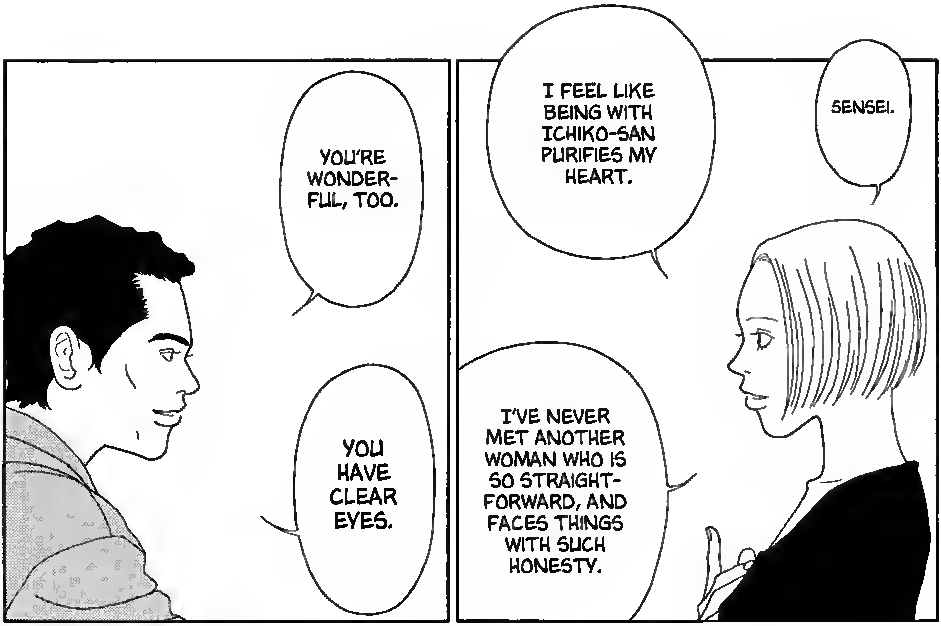

I'M PRETTY SURE...
...HE'LL SIMPLY ACCEPT ME.
YOUR FATHER IS HOSEI IZUMIYA.
rattle rattle
TRANSLATING PUNK WRITERS AND PROVOCATIVE GAY NOVELISTS...
HERE!
clap
NICE!
...IS KINO OF IZUMIYA-SENSEI'S SPECIALTY, ISN'T IT?
HE'S NOTHING LIKE MY DAD, WHO BELIEVES HOMOSEXUALITY IS A MENTAL ILLNESS.
MY OLD MAN WOULD LOCK ME IN A PSYCHIATRIC WARD IF HE FOUND ME BREAST TO BREAST WITH ANOTHER WOMAN.

AT LEAST WHILE I'M IN COLLEGE I WILL.
SCRATCH
ARE YOU ALWAYS GOING TO KEEP IT A SECRET FROM YOUR PARENTS, ELLIE?
BUT I REALLY WANT TO MEET YOUR DAD.
DON'T WORRY. I'M SURE HE'LL ACCEPT ME.
HEY, GIMMIE THAT CANDY.
YOU THINK SO?

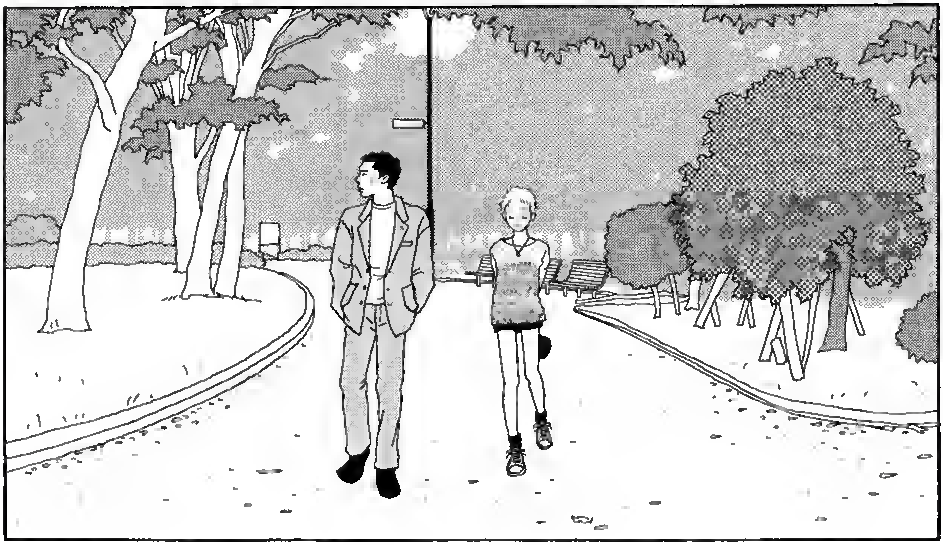
And that's how we came to this.

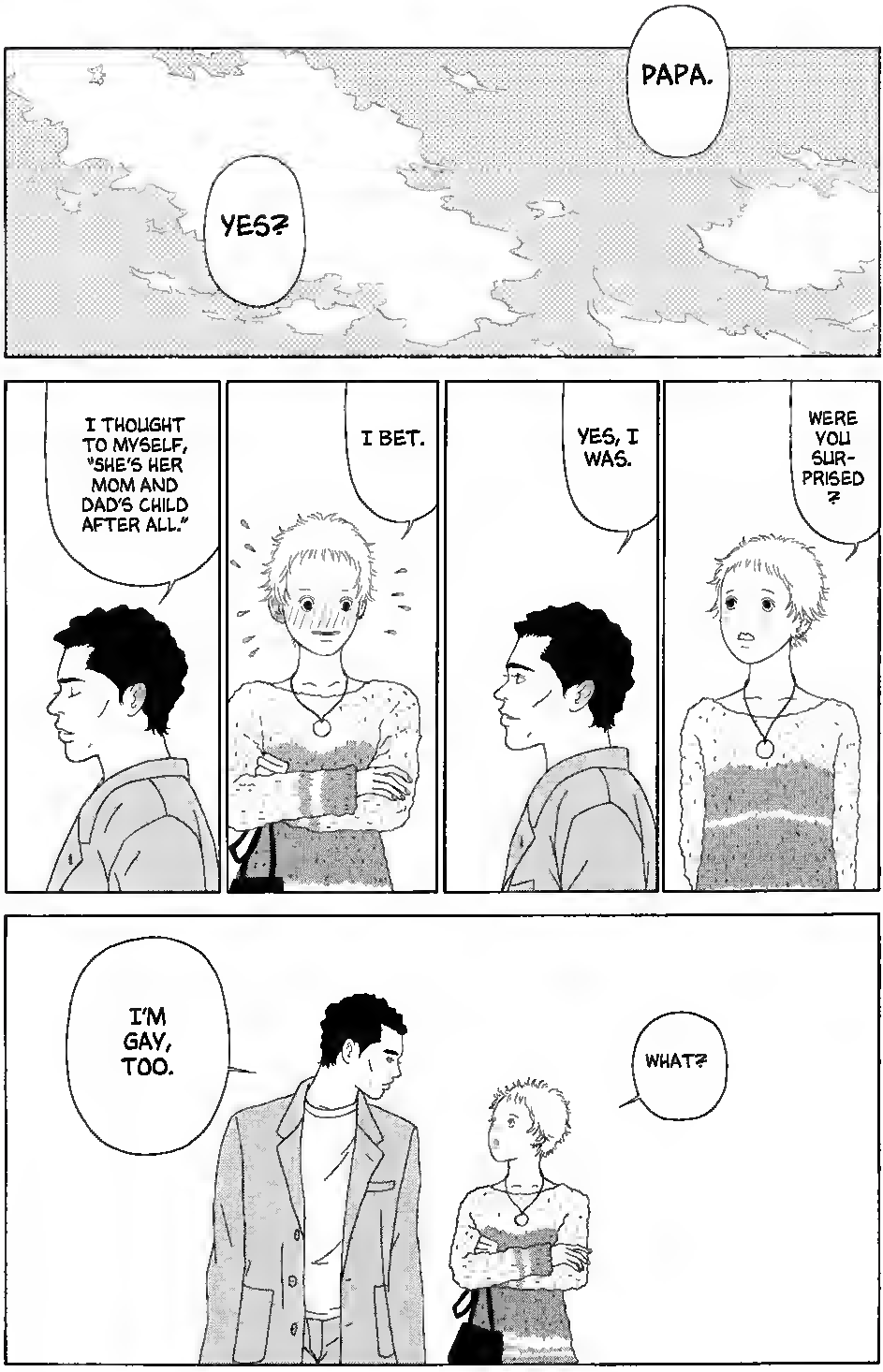


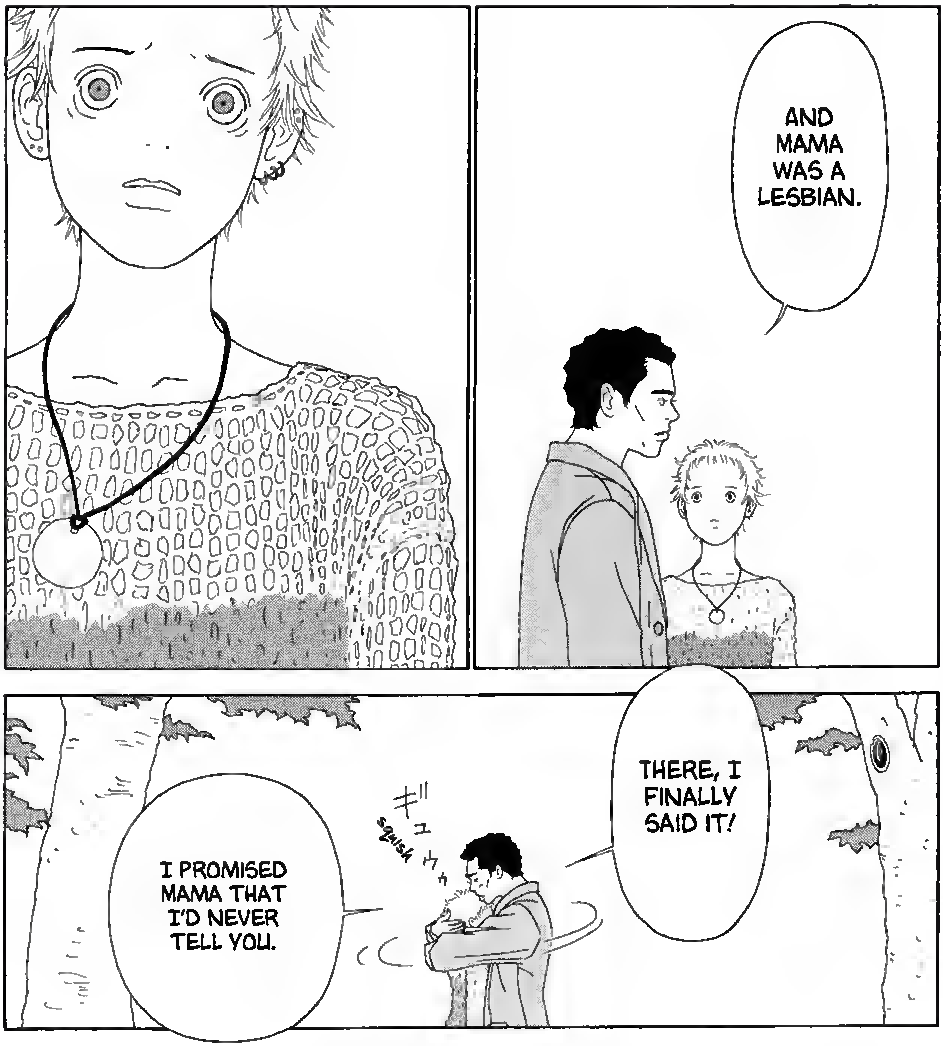

WELL, I MET ELLIE AT A CONCERT AT THIS CLUB.
THE MOMENT OUR EYES MET...
...I KNEW SHE WAS THE ONE I'D BEEN LOOKING FOR.
THE NEXT THING WE KNEW WE WERE EMBRACING AND KISSING, RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF THIS FRENZIED CROWD.
WHAT ARE YOU MAJORING IN, ELLIE-SAN?
LAW. I WANT TO BECOME A LAWYER.
ELLIE'S A REAL SCHOLAR.
SHE KNOWS ALL ABOUT LITERATURE, TOO!
I RECENTLY READ A SHORT STORY COLLECTION BY J. P. HIRAM.
IT WAS VERY INTERESTING.
WOW, I'M SURPRISED. IT TAKES SERIOUS LINGUISTIC TALENT TO APPRECIATE THE ORIGINAL! YOU HAVE GOOD TASTE.
THE JAPANESE VERSION IS COMING OUT SOON, WITH MY TRANSLATION.


SENSEI.
I FEEL LIKE BEING WITH ICHIKO-SAN PURIFIES MY HEART.
I'VE NEVER MET ANOTHER WOMAN WHO IS SO STRAIGHT-FORWARD, AND FACES THINGS WITH SUCH HONESTY.
YOU'RE WONDER-FUL, TOO.
YOU HAVE CLEAR EYES.

And then Ellie went to work, and Papa and I strolled back home.



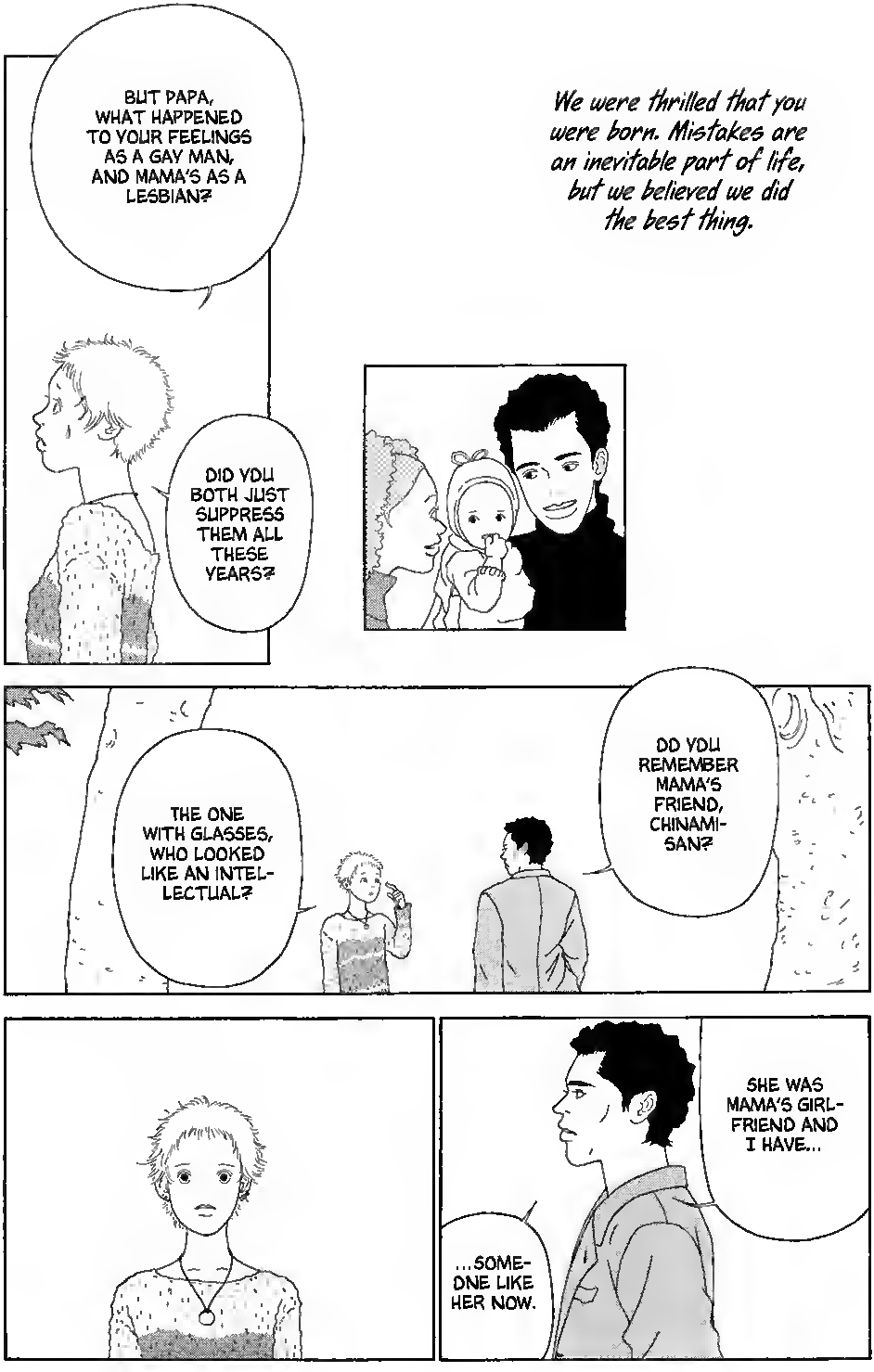

PAPA.
YES?
I THOUGHT TO MYSELF, "SHE'S HER MOM AND DAD'S CHILD AFTER ALL."
I BET.
YES, I WAS.
WERE YOU SURPRISED?
I'M GAY, TOO.
WHAT?

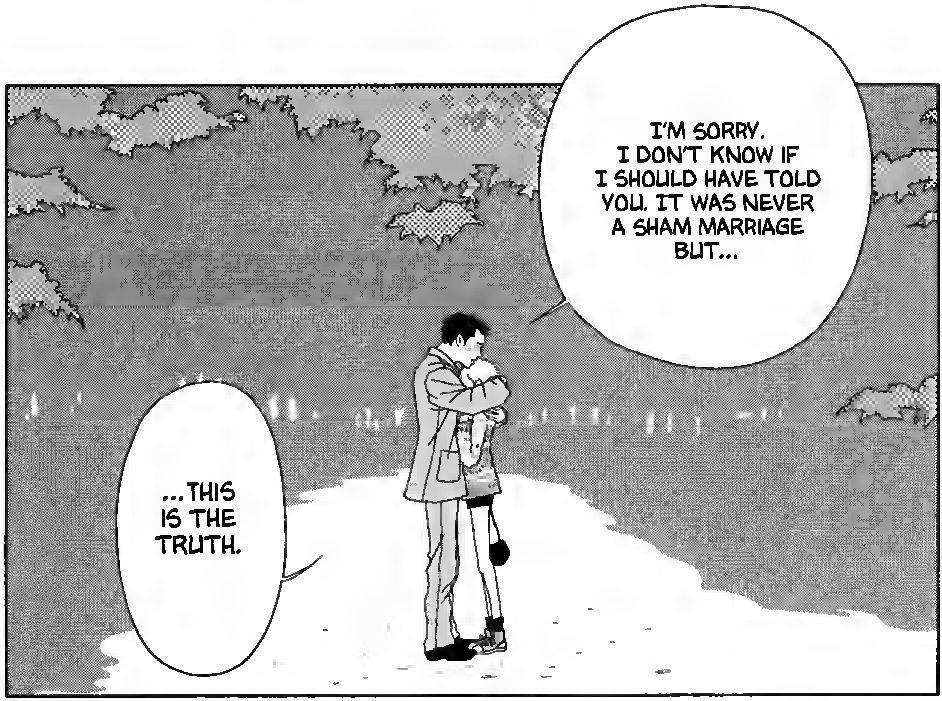


One day, completely coincidentally, we were consoling each other about our respective heartbreak...

I was never in love with Mama, but she was my best friend.

I WANT A LIFE WITH A CHILD.
I WANT TO HAVE A FAMILY.
...and Mama said this.
It shocked me. I was just thinking the same thing.
...WITH A WOMAN, TOO.
I CAN SLEEP ...
clink
I SLEPT WITH A MAN ONCE, A LONG TIME AGO.
And then we went to a hotel and decided to get married on our way home.
All our friends, gay and straight, accused us of having a sham marriage, but it wasn't true.

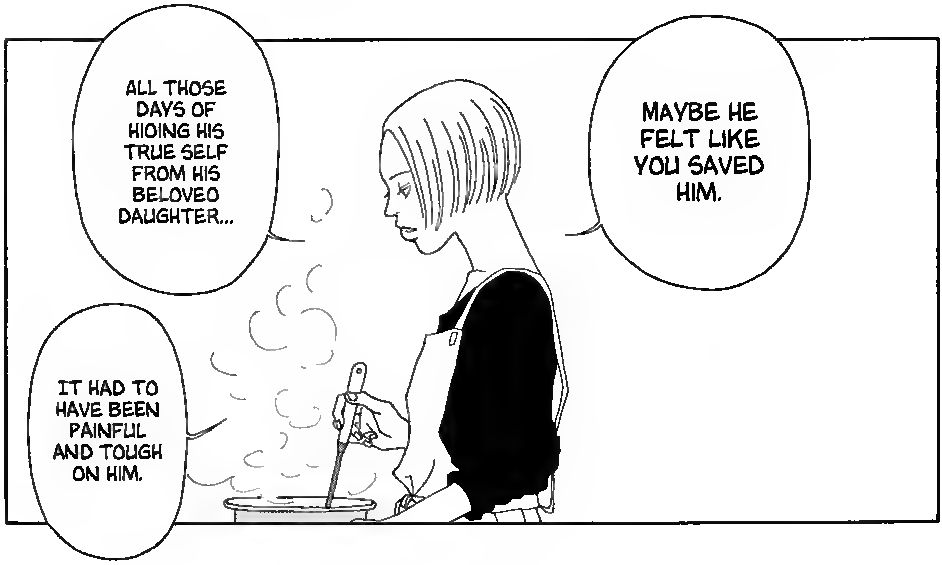

BUT PAPA, WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR FEELINGS AS A GAY MAN, AND MAMA'S AS A LESBIAN?
DID YOU BOTH JUST SUPPRESS THEM ALL THESE YEARS?
We were thrilled that you were born. Mistakes are an inevitable part of life, but we believed we did the best thing.
DO YOU REMEMBER MAMA'S FRIEND, CHINAMI-SAN?
THE ONE WITH GLASSES, WHO LOOKED LIKE AN INTEL-LECTUAL?
SHE WAS MAMA'S GIRL-FRIEND AND I HAVE...
...SOME-ONE LIKE HER NOW.

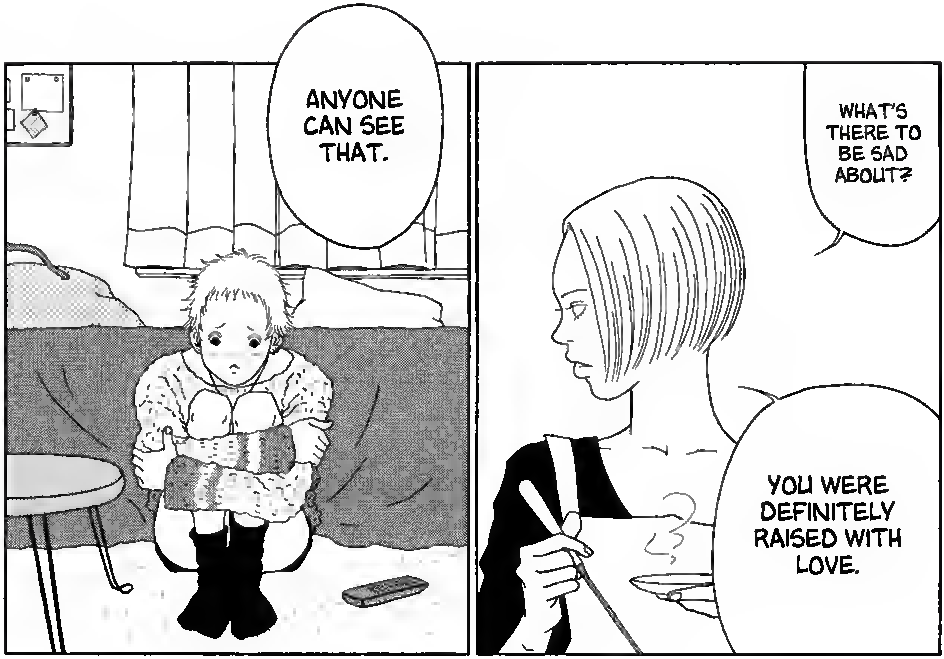


I don't know why I'm sad, but something is making me feel that way.

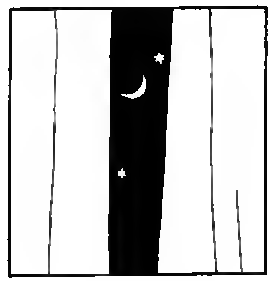
That night, Papa let me stay at Ellie's place.

My head is spinning.

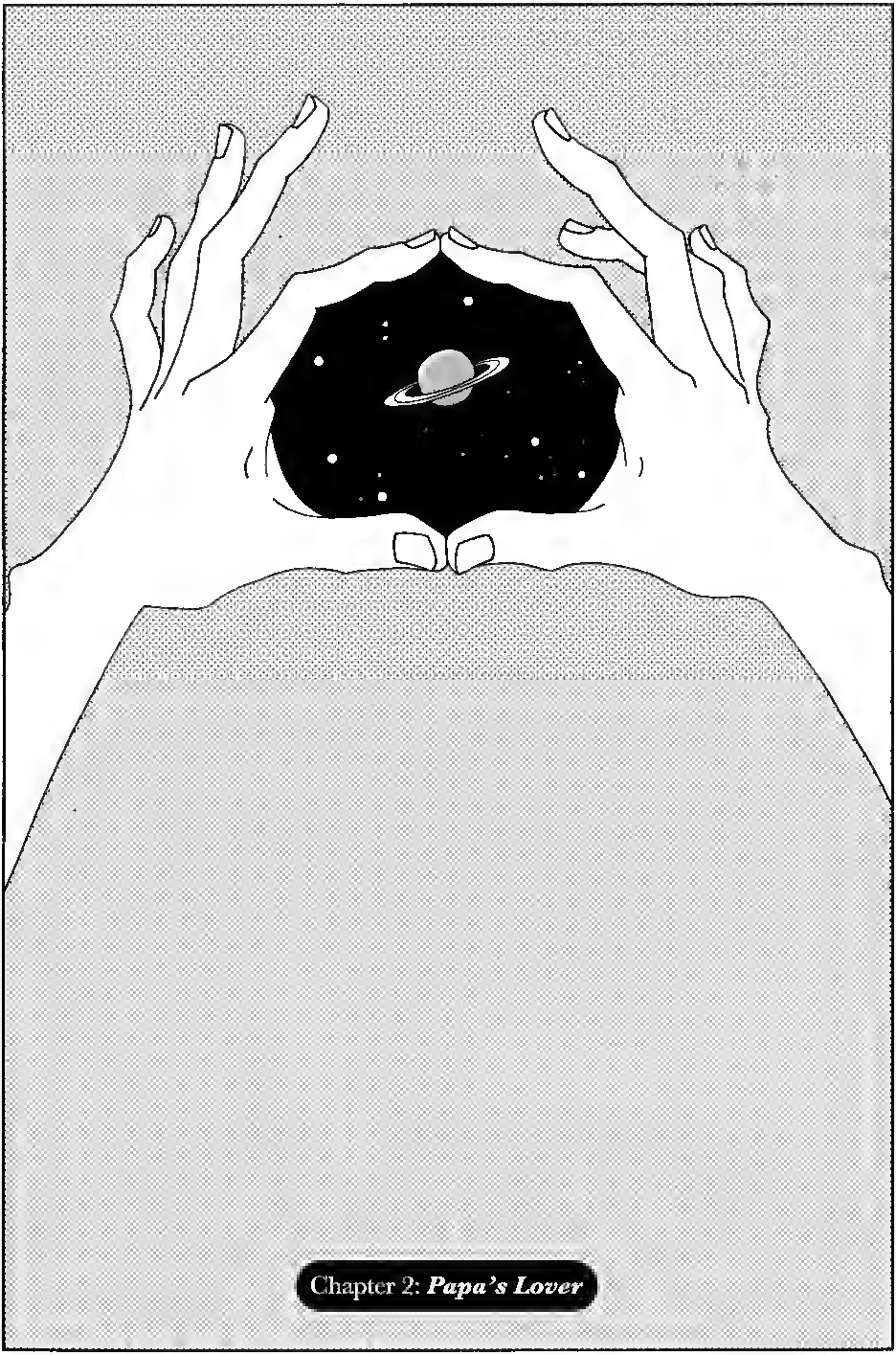

ALL THOSE DAYS OF HIDING HIS TRUE SELF FROM HIS BELOVED DAUGHTER...
MAYBE HE FELT LIKE YOU SAVED HIM.
IT HAD TO HAVE BEEN PAINFUL AND TOUGH ON HIM.



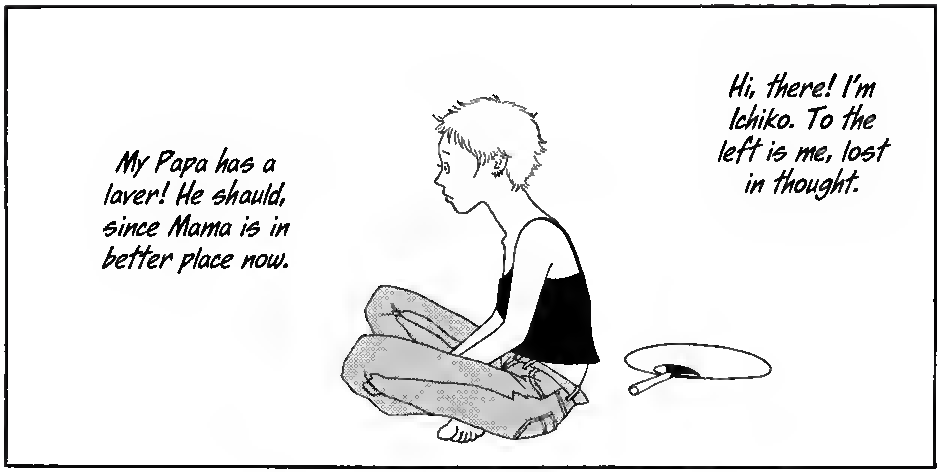
Papa accepted our relationship, so he told me his secret. I should be happy. I'm extremely happy. It's the pinnacle of happiness. I'm happy. Thanks, Papa. Be happy, Ichiko. Smile, Ichiko!



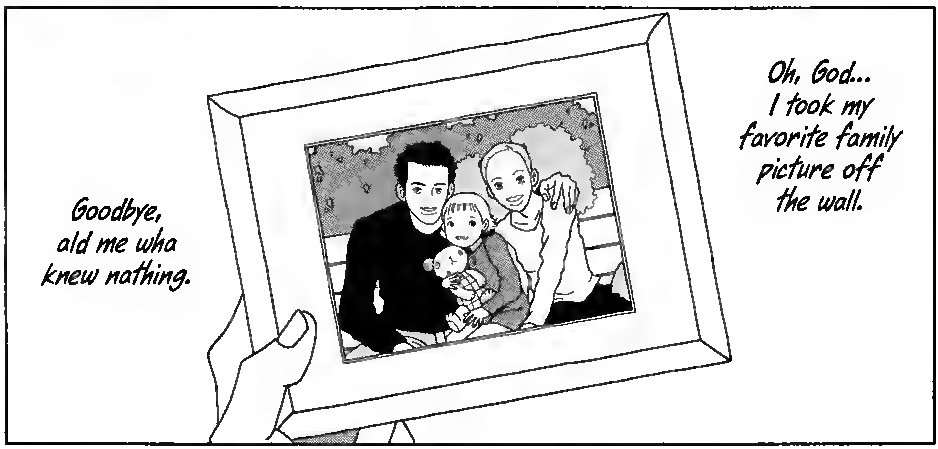
I fell asleep beside Ellie as all this ran through my head.



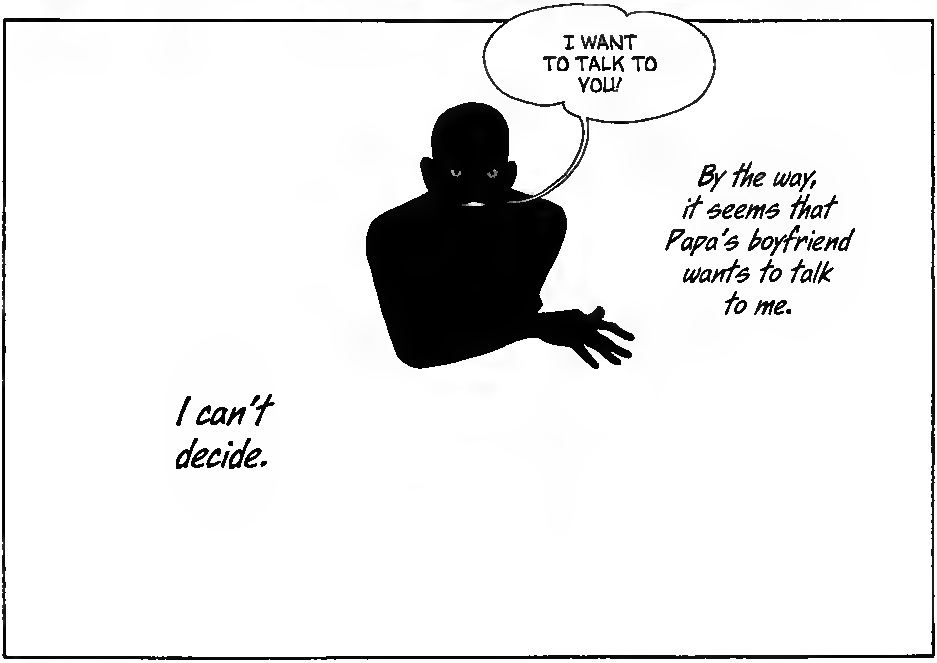
Chapter 2: ***Papa's Lover***

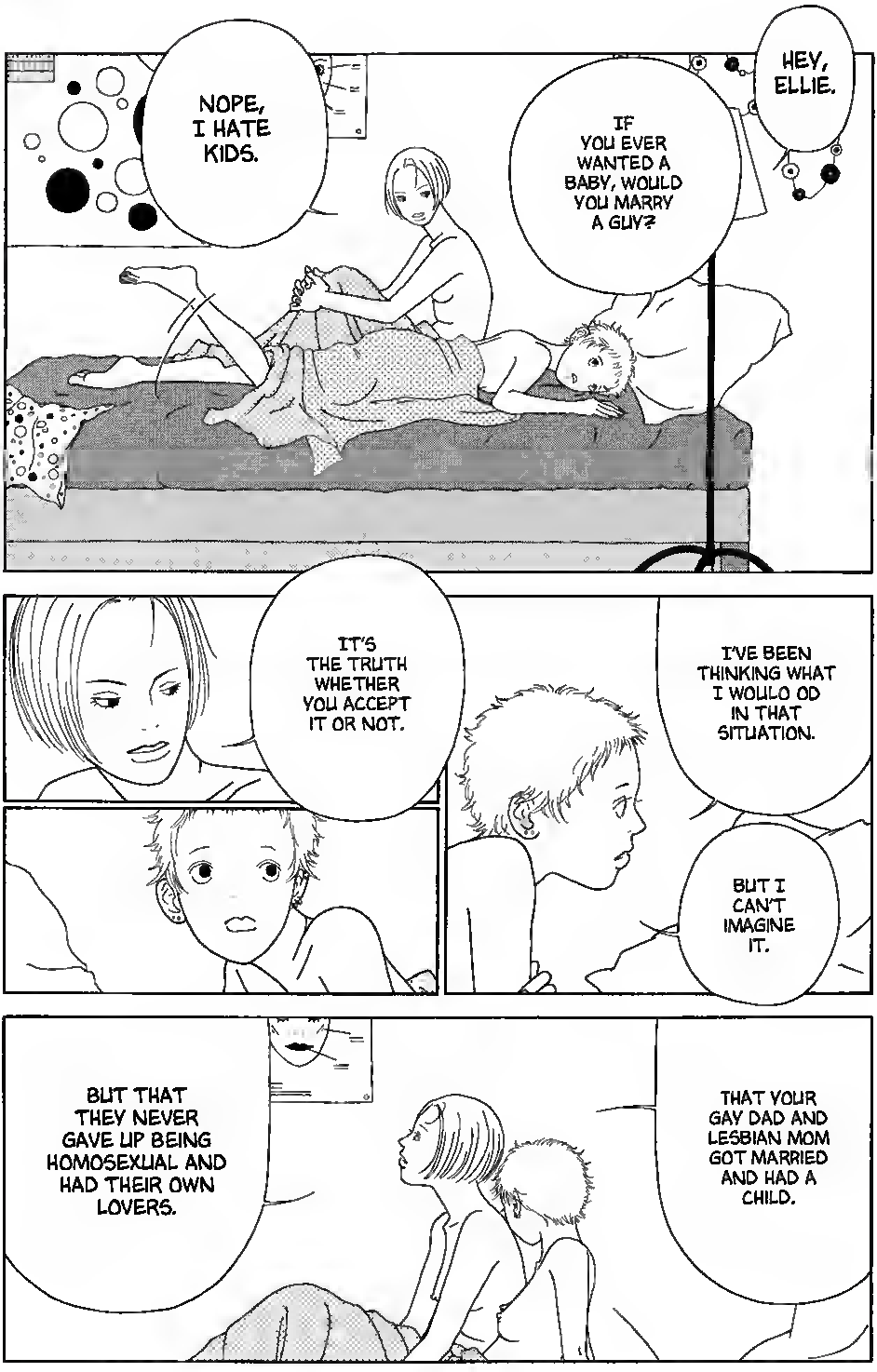

Hi, there! I'm Ichiko. To the left is me, lost in thought.
My Papa has a lover! He should, since Mama is in better place now.

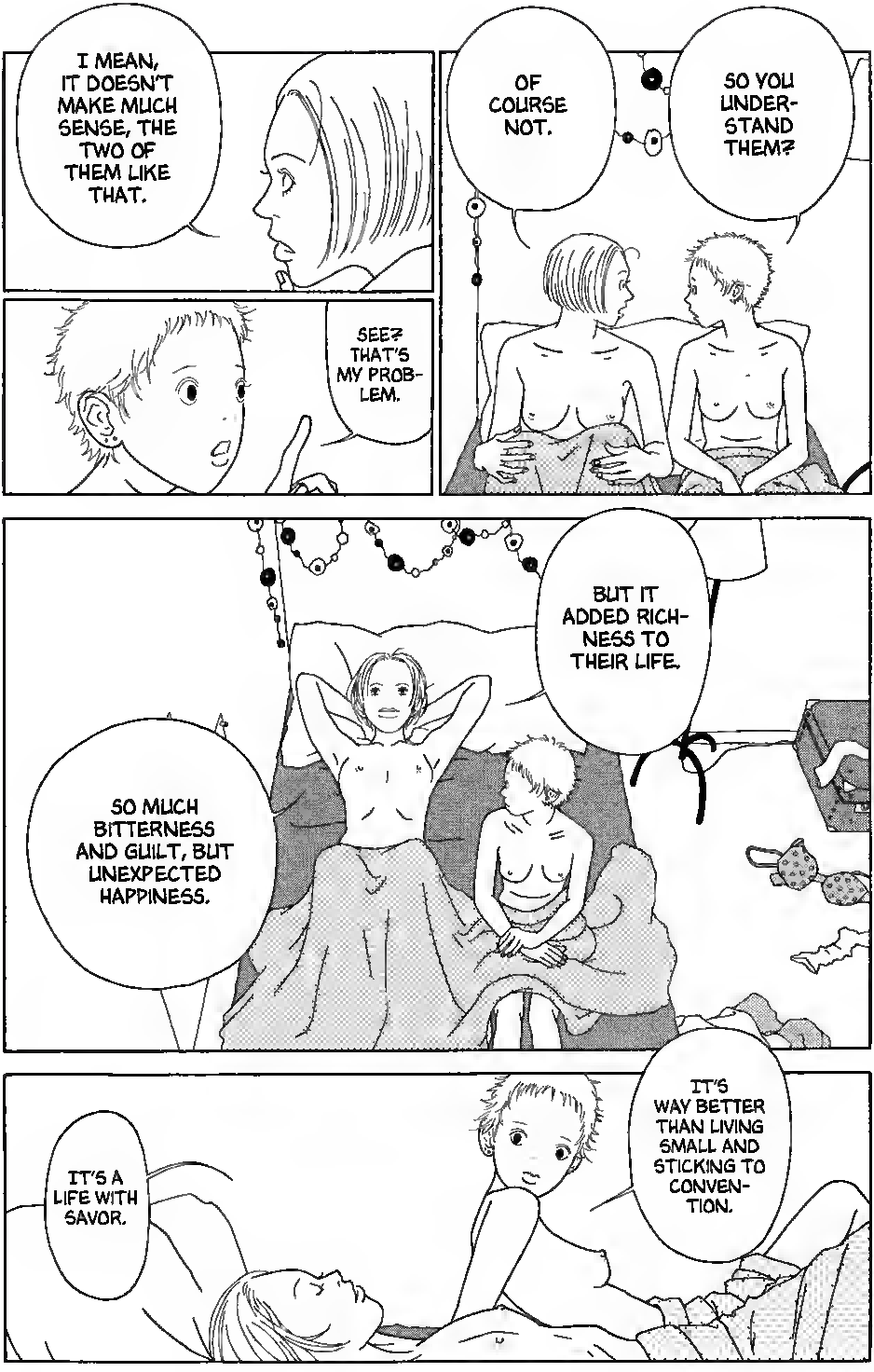
Papa's gay! And Mama was a lesbian!
But my dad was actually gay.

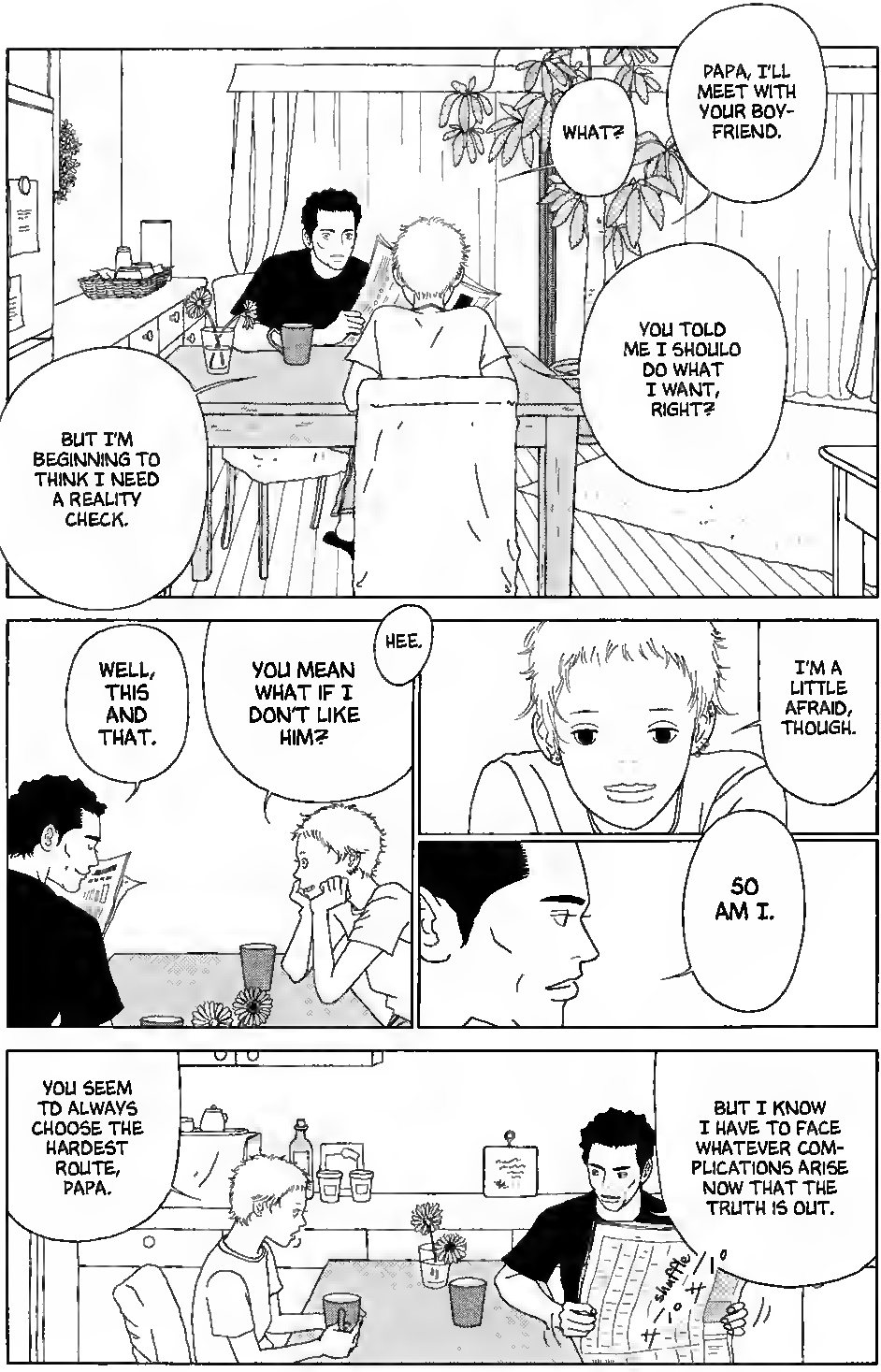

Oh, God... I took my favorite family picture off the wall.
Goodbye, old me who knew nothing.

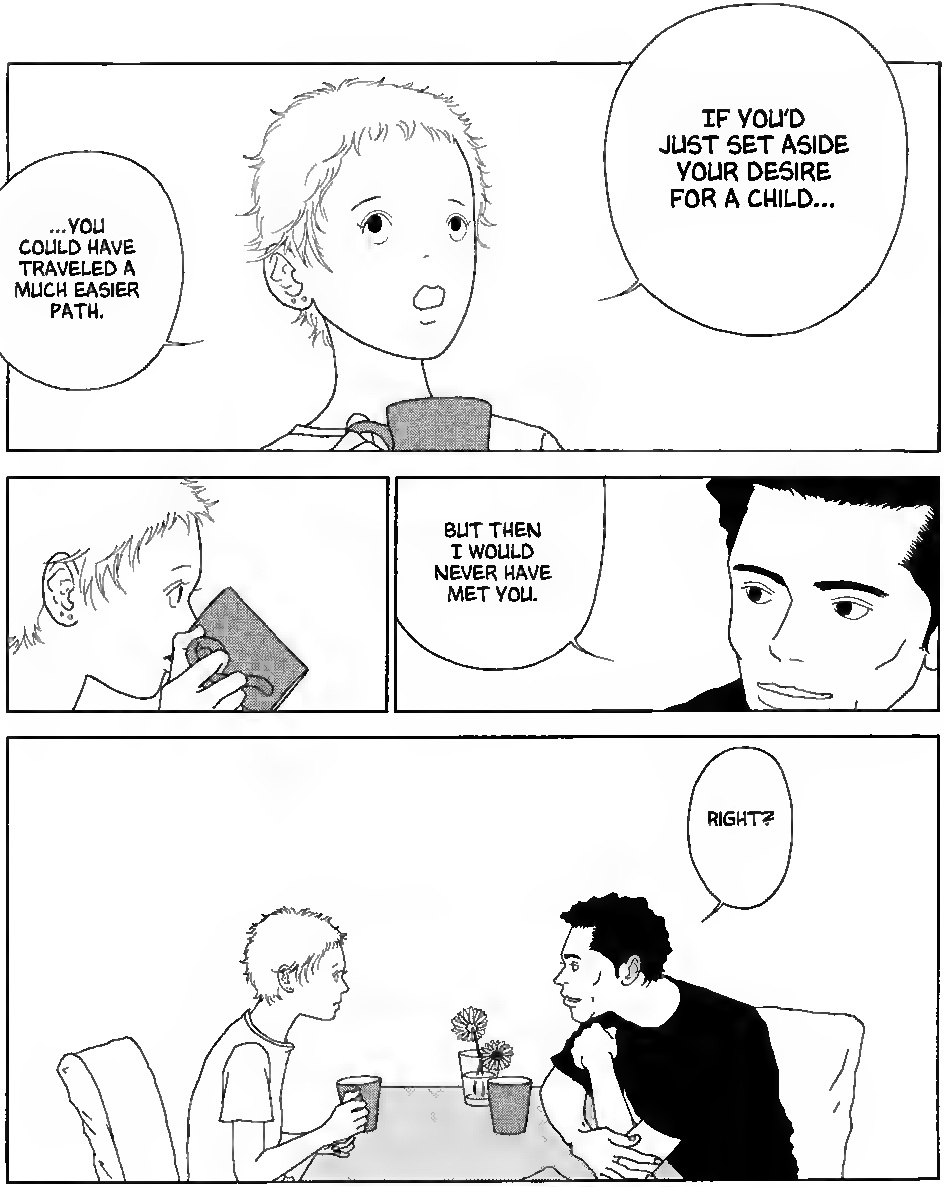
Is this the price of falling in love with a woman? If I'd only fallen in love with a man would I have spent my days in happy ignorance? Lately I've been quite emotional.


I WANT TO TALK TO YOU!
By the way, it seems that Papa's boyfriend wants to talk to me.
I can't decide.

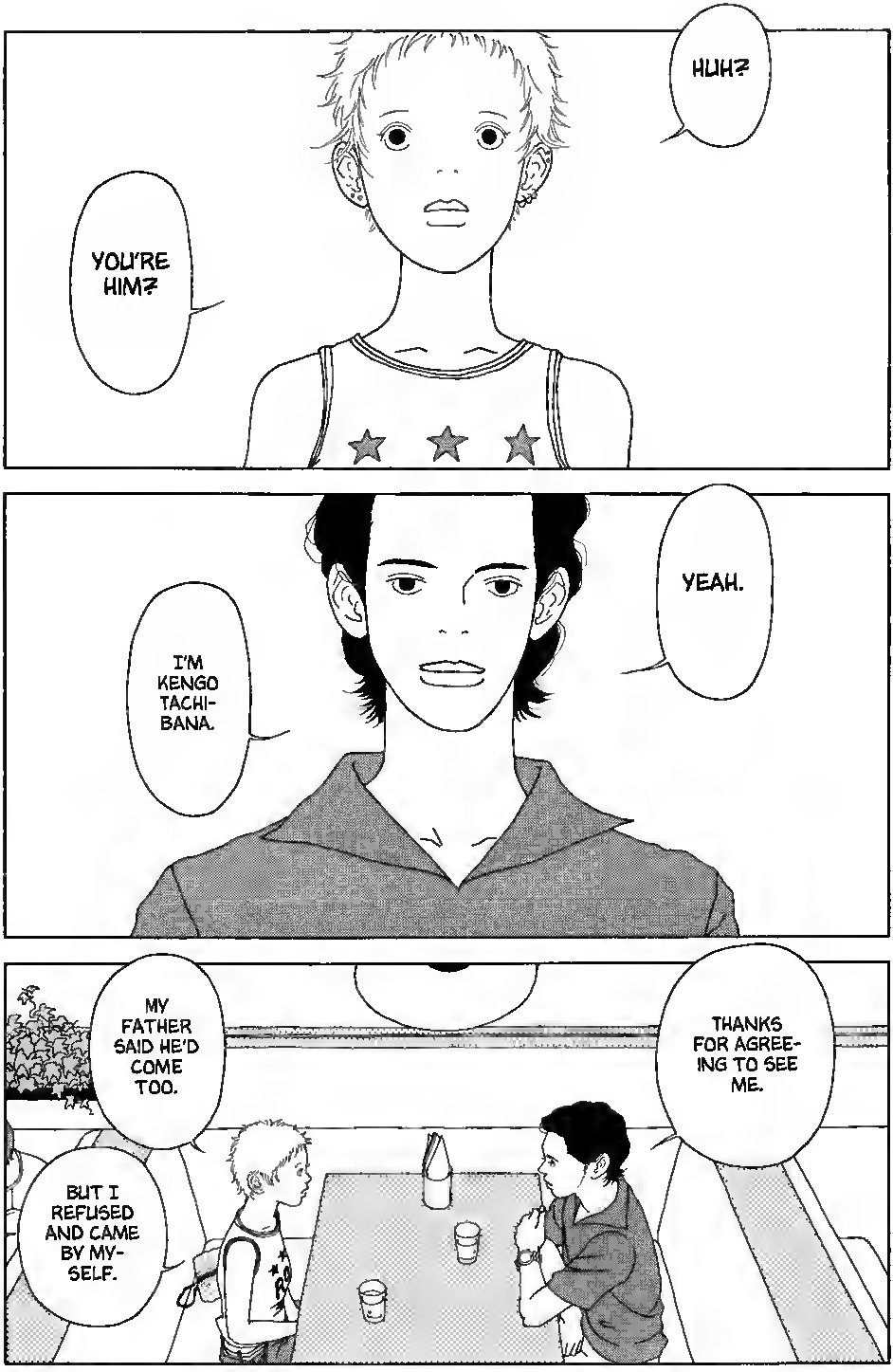

HEY, ELLIE.
IF YOU EVER WANTED A BABY, WOULD YOU MARRY A GUY?
NOPE, I HATE KIDS.
I'VE BEEN THINKING WHAT I WOULD DO IN THAT SITUATION.
BUT I CAN'T IMAGINE IT.
IT'S THE TRUTH WHETHER YOU ACCEPT IT OR NOT.
THAT YOUR GAY DAD AND LESBIAN MOM GOT MARRIED AND HAD A CHILD.
BUT THAT THEY NEVER GAVE UP BEING HOMOSEXUAL AND HAD THEIR OWN LOVERS.


I MEAN, IT DOESN'T MAKE MUCH SENSE, THE TWO OF THEM LIKE THAT.
SEE? THAT'S MY PROB-LEM.
OF COURSE NOT.
SO YOU UNDER-STAND THEM?
BUT IT ADDED RICH-NESS TO THEIR LIFE.
SO MUCH BITTERNESS AND GUILT, BUT UNEXPECTED HAPPINESS.
IT'S A LIFE WITH SAVOR.
IT'S WAY BETTER THAN LIVING SMALL AND STICKING TO CONVEN-TION.


PAPA, I'LL MEET WITH YOUR BOY-FRIEND.
WHAT?
YOU TOLD ME I SHOULD DO WHAT I WANT, RIGHT?
BUT I'M BEGINNING TO THINK I NEED A REALITY CHECK.
HEE.
YOU MEAN WHAT IF I DON'T LIKE HIM?
WELL, THIS AND THAT.
I'M A LITTLE AFRAID, THOUGH.
SO AM I.
YOU SEEM TO ALWAYS CHOOSE THE HARDEST ROUTE, PAPA.
BUT I KNOW I HAVE TO FACE WHATEVER COM-PLICATIONS ARISE NOW THAT THE TRUTH IS OUT.
shuffle

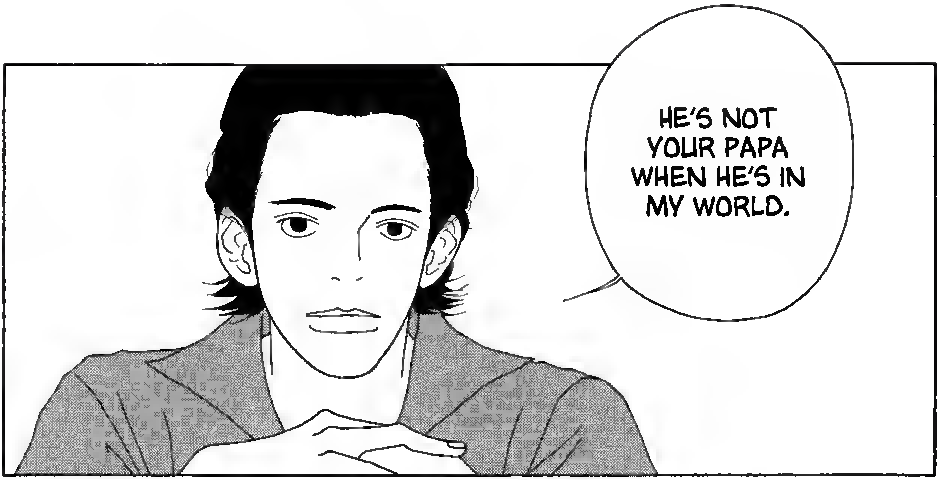

IF YOU'D JUST SET ASIDE YOUR DESIRE FOR A CHILD...
...YOU COULD HAVE TRAVELED A MUCH EASIER PATH.
BUT THEN I WOULD NEVER HAVE MET YOU.
RIGHT?

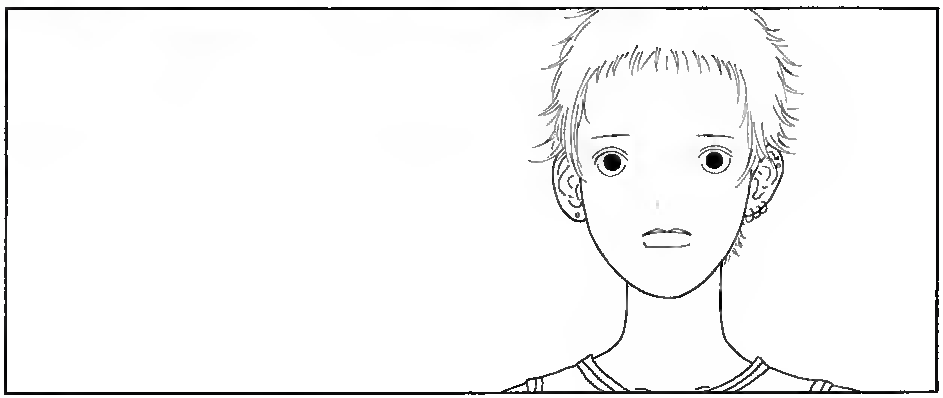
And then
Sunday came.


HUH?
YOU'RE HIM?
YEAH.
I'M KENGO TACHI-BANA.
MY FATHER SAID HE'D COME TOO.
THANKS FOR AGREE-ING TO SEE ME.
BUT I REFUSED AND CAME BY MY-SELF.

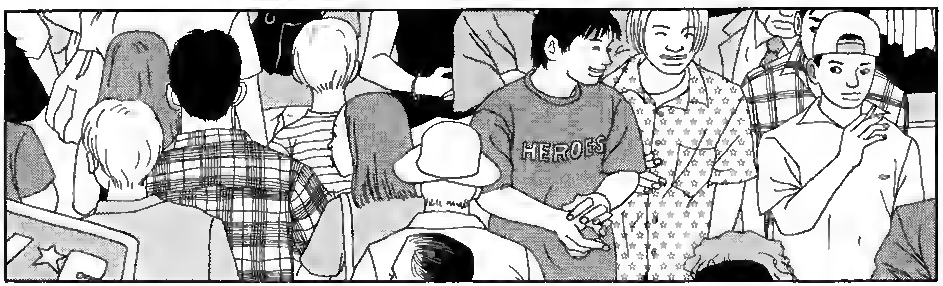
HERE'S YOUR ORDER.
clatter
ME, NEITHER.
NOW THAT WE'RE FACE TO FACE, I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY.
THIS IS ROUGH.
BUT IT'S BETTER THIS WAY.
THAT WE'RE AWKWARD WITH EACH OTHER, I MEAN.
I DON'T SAY THAT TO BE CRUEL.
IT'S JUST THAT YOU AND I LIVE IN TWO DIFFERENT WORLDS.

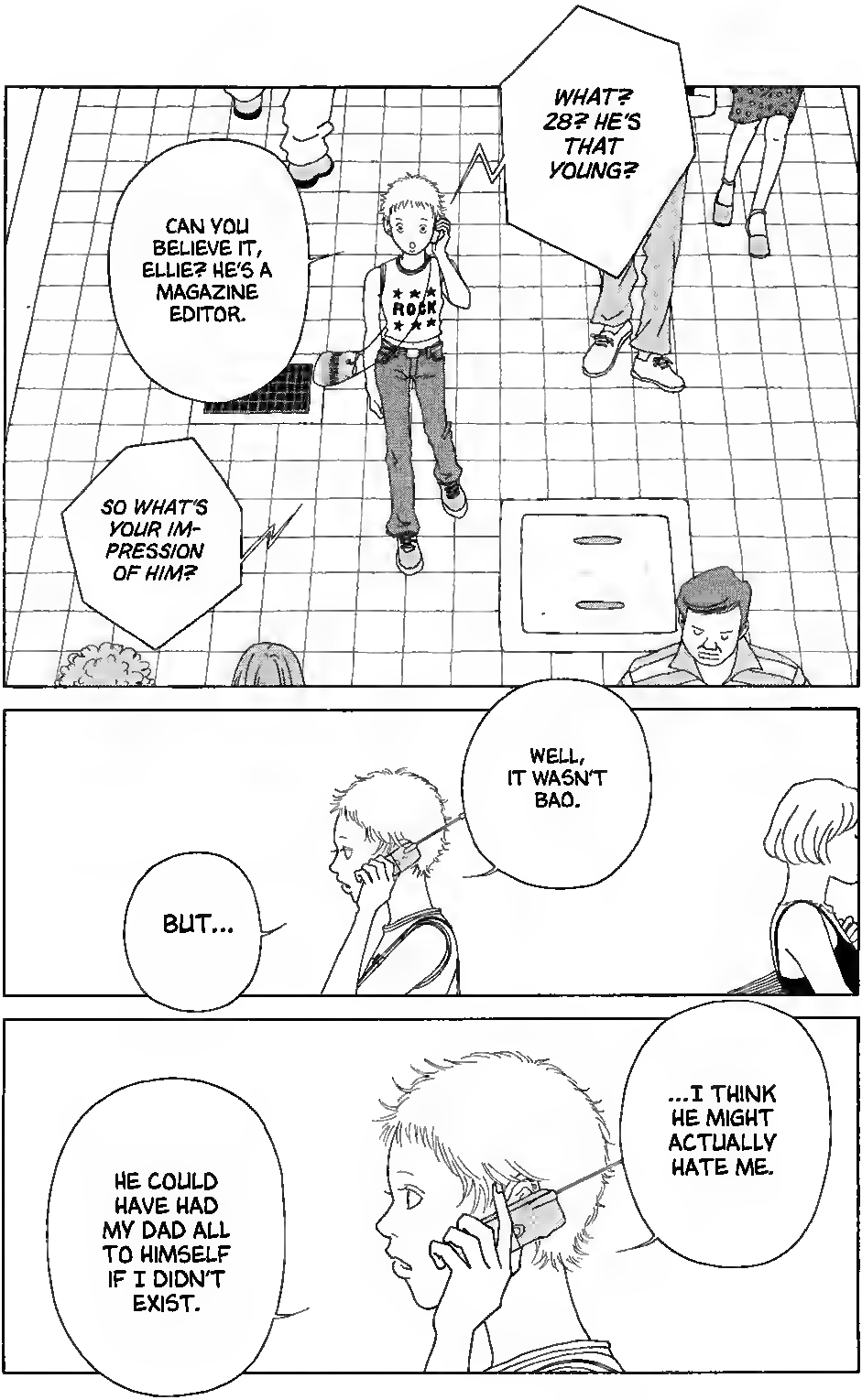
You live on Planet A. I live on Planet B. Only he can visit both planets.
I can't breathe on your planet and you can't live on my planet.
IT WAS JUST TO PROTECT MY WORLD.
...I DIDN'T ONCE STEP IN YOUR WORLD.
IN THE THREE YEARS SINCE I MET HIM...
BUT IT WASN'T FOR YOUR SAKE, OR HIS.
AND TO PROTECT THE MAN HE IS WHEN HE'S WITH ME.





As we parted, he said we'd probably never meet again.

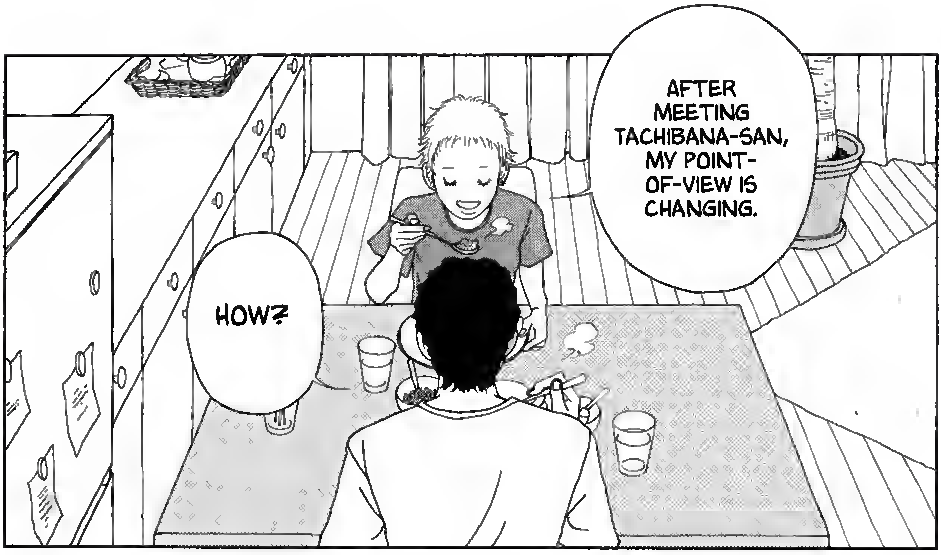



WHAT? 28? HE'S THAT YOUNG?
CAN YOU BELIEVE IT, ELLIE? HE'S A MAGAZINE EDITOR.
ROCK
SO WHAT'S YOUR IM-PRESSION OF HIM?
WELL, IT WASN'T BAD.
BUT...
...I THINK HE MIGHT ACTUALLY HATE ME.
HE COULD HAVE HAD MY DAD ALL TO HIMSELF IF I DIDN'T EXIST.

HEY, ICHIKO. DON'T YOU THINK...
I DOUBT HE'D BE ATTRACTED TO YOUR FATHER IF YOU DIDN'T EXIST.
...EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON?
客待ち
待ち合わせも駐車禁止

Sign: *No Parking, Stopping or Standing*

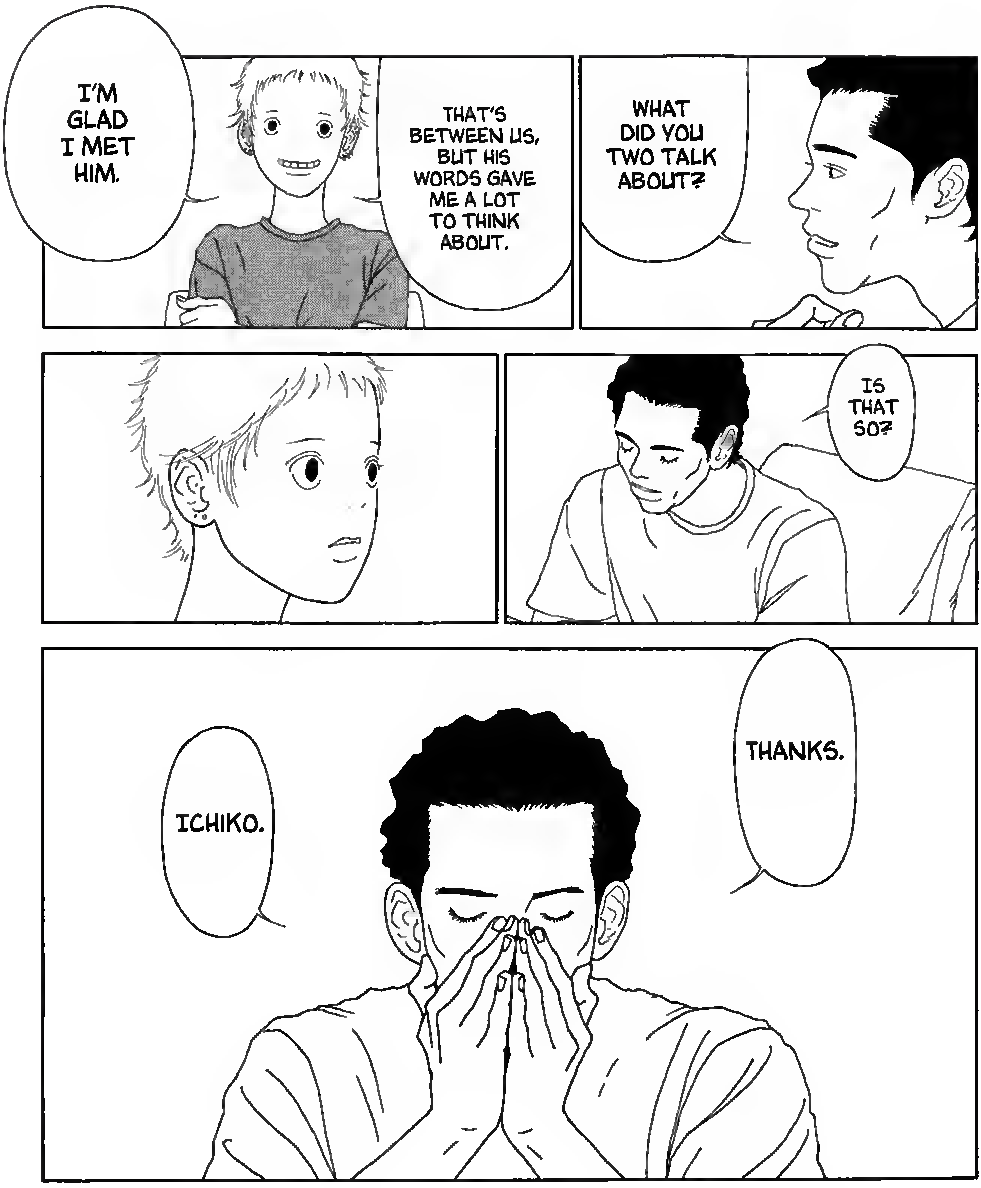
When I got home, Dad was making curry.


AFTER MEETING TACHIBANA-SAN, MY POINT-OF-VIEW IS CHANGING.
HOW?

gulp

...WAS BECAUSE YOU'RE GAY.
THE REASON I NEVER HAD TO DEAL WITH A NEW MOM...
clink

SO, IN A WAY, ALL YOUR BOY-FRIENDS ARE ON MY SIDE.
THEY'D DEFINITELY NEVER WANT TO BE MY MOTHER.

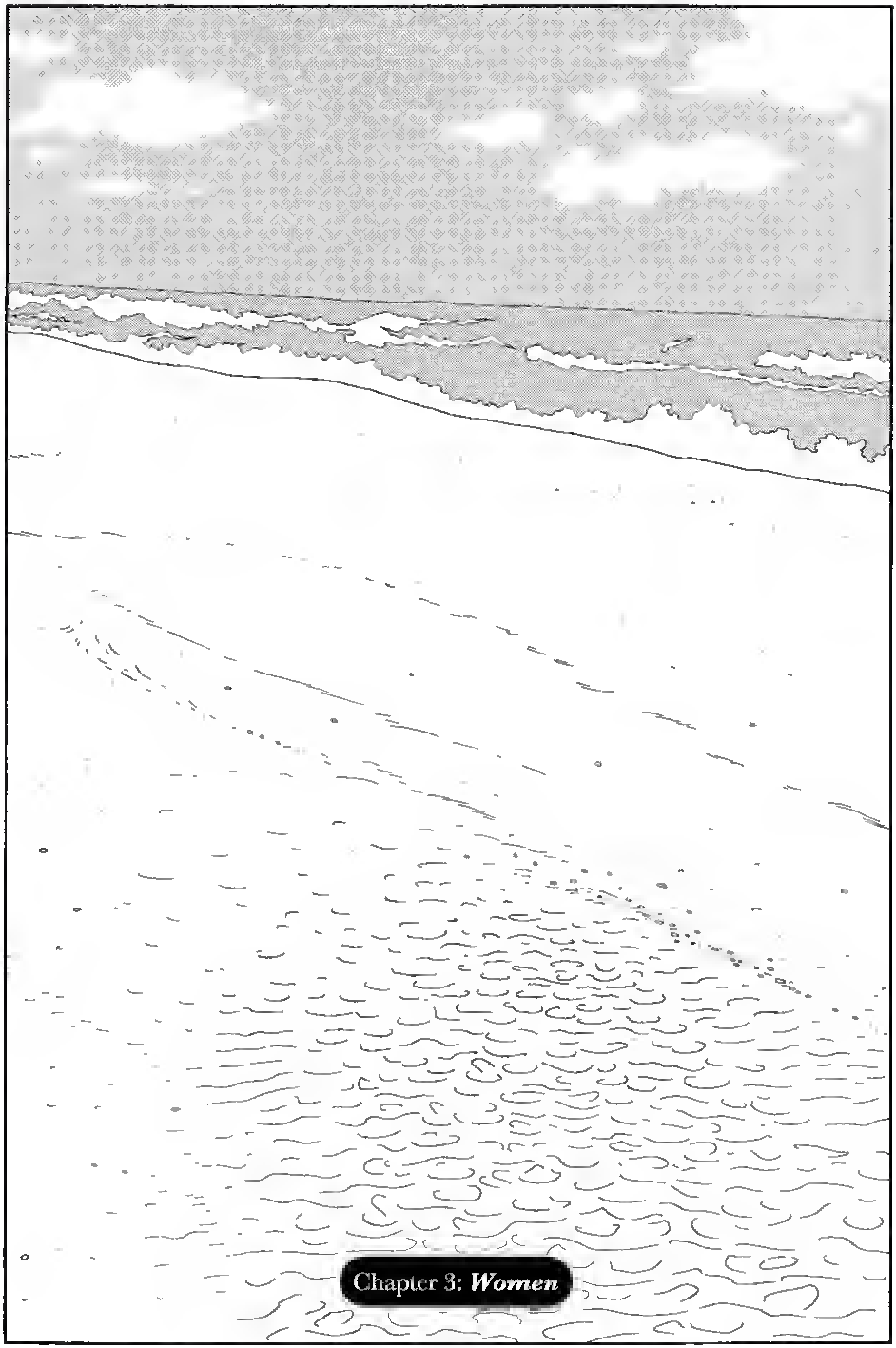

I'M GLAD I MET HIM.
THAT'S BETWEEN US, BUT HIS WORDS GAVE ME A LOT TO THINK ABOUT.
WHAT DID YOU TWO TALK ABOUT?
IS THAT SO?
ICHIKO.
THANKS.

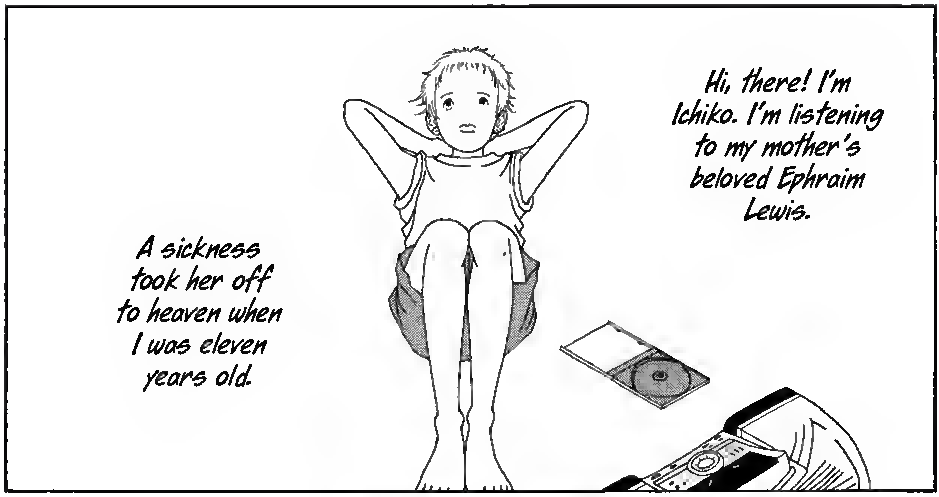
After that, we talked about curry— something awkwardly upbeat for a change.

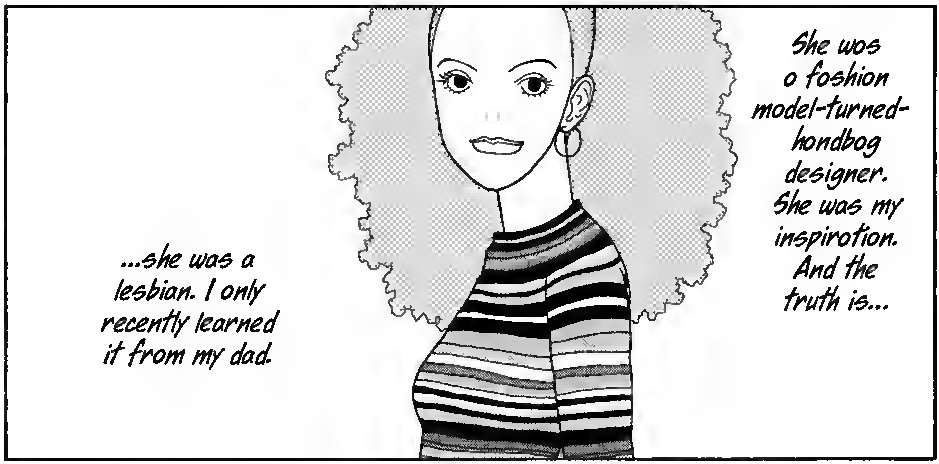
I think about Tachibana-san as I look at the night sky. The world I could never step into and the man who isn't my papa when he's in that world.

There are a lot of things I should know but there are a lot of things I'm better off...

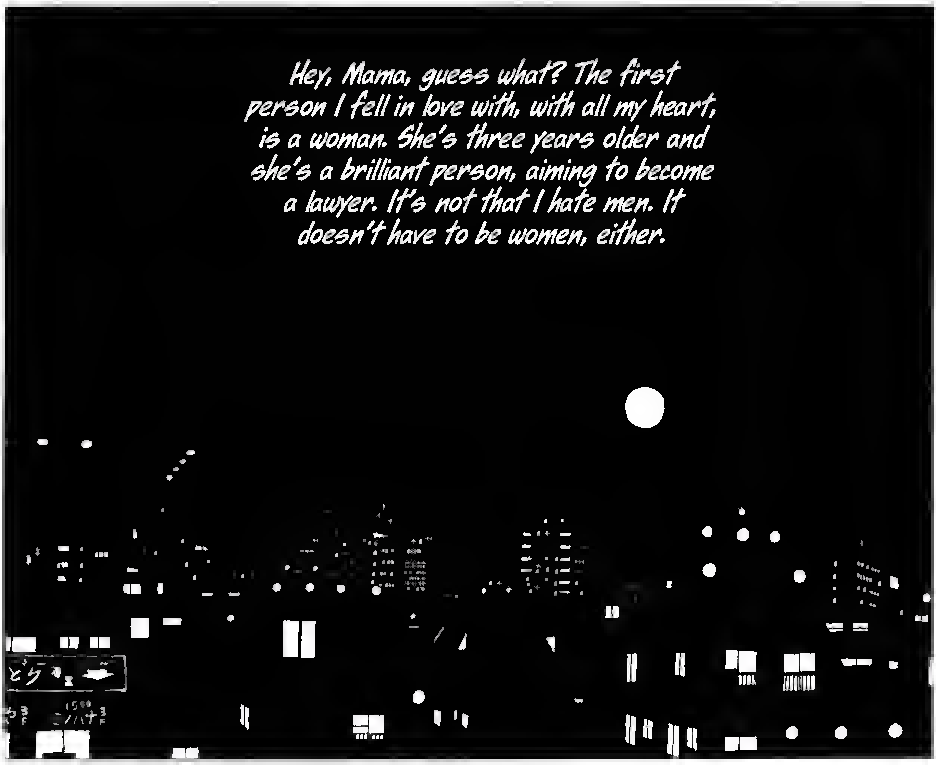
...not knowing.

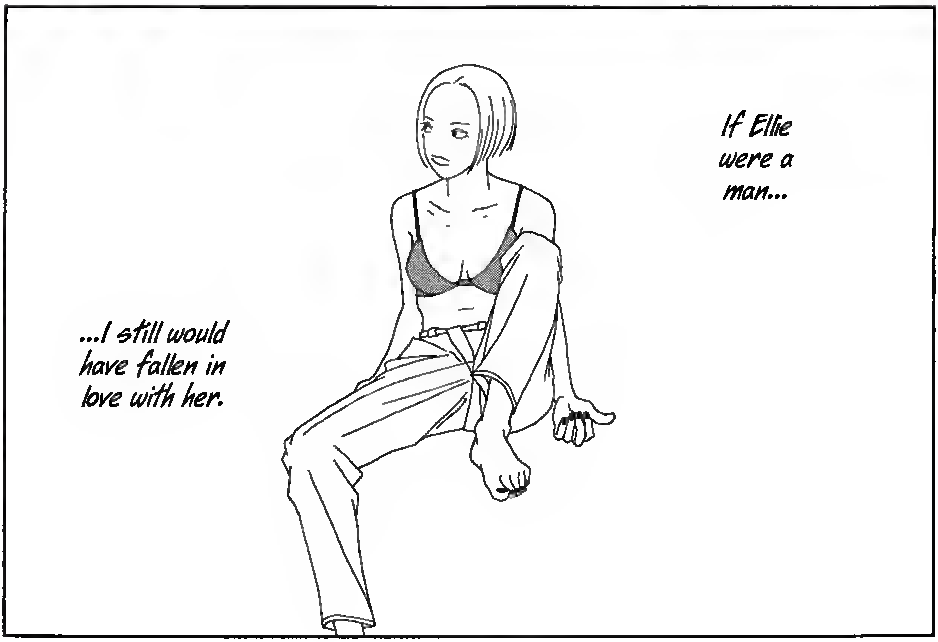

Chapter 3: *Women*

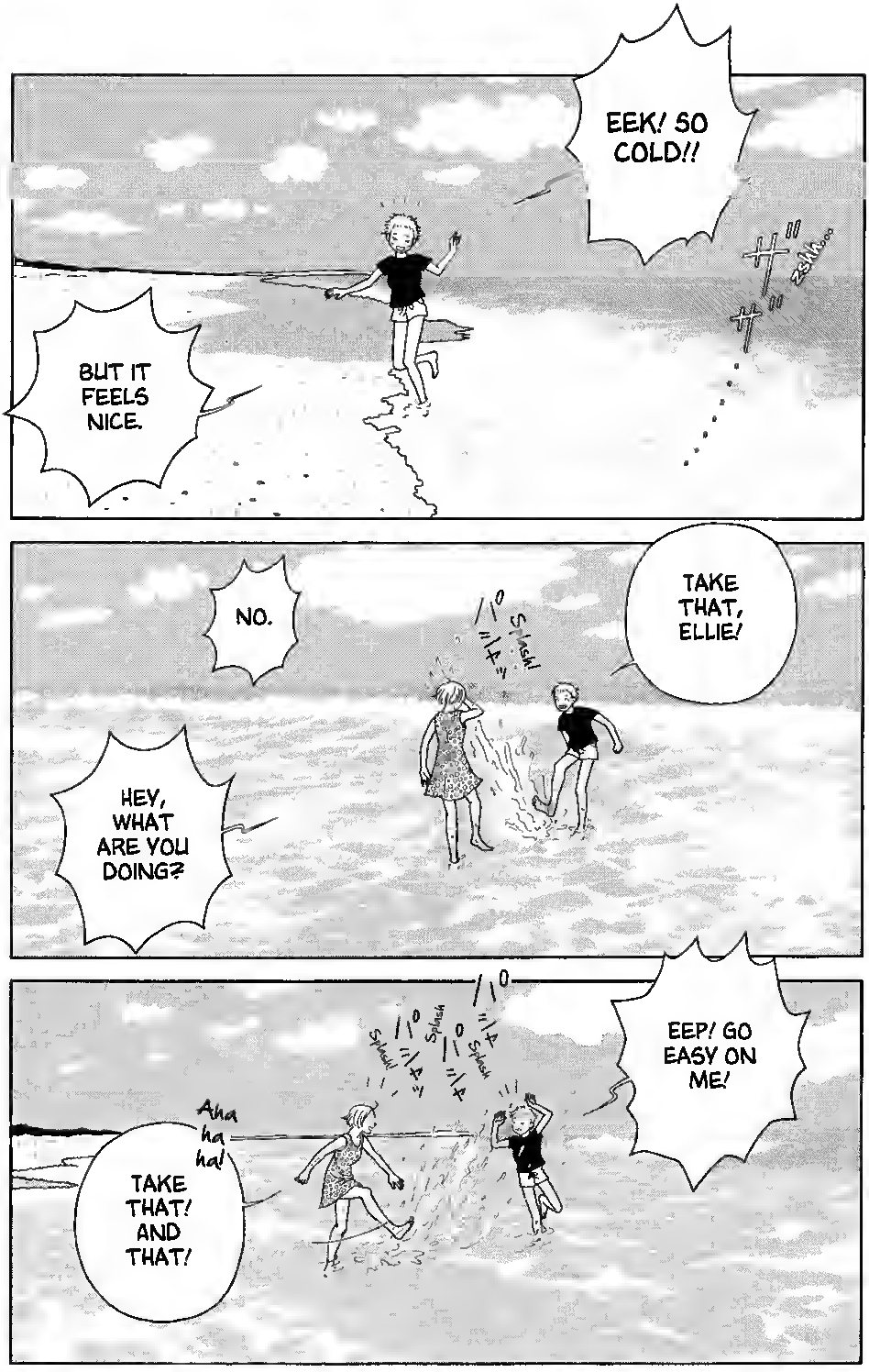

Hi, there! I'm Ichiko. I'm listening to my mother's beloved Ephraim Lewis.
A sickness took her off to heaven when I was eleven years old.

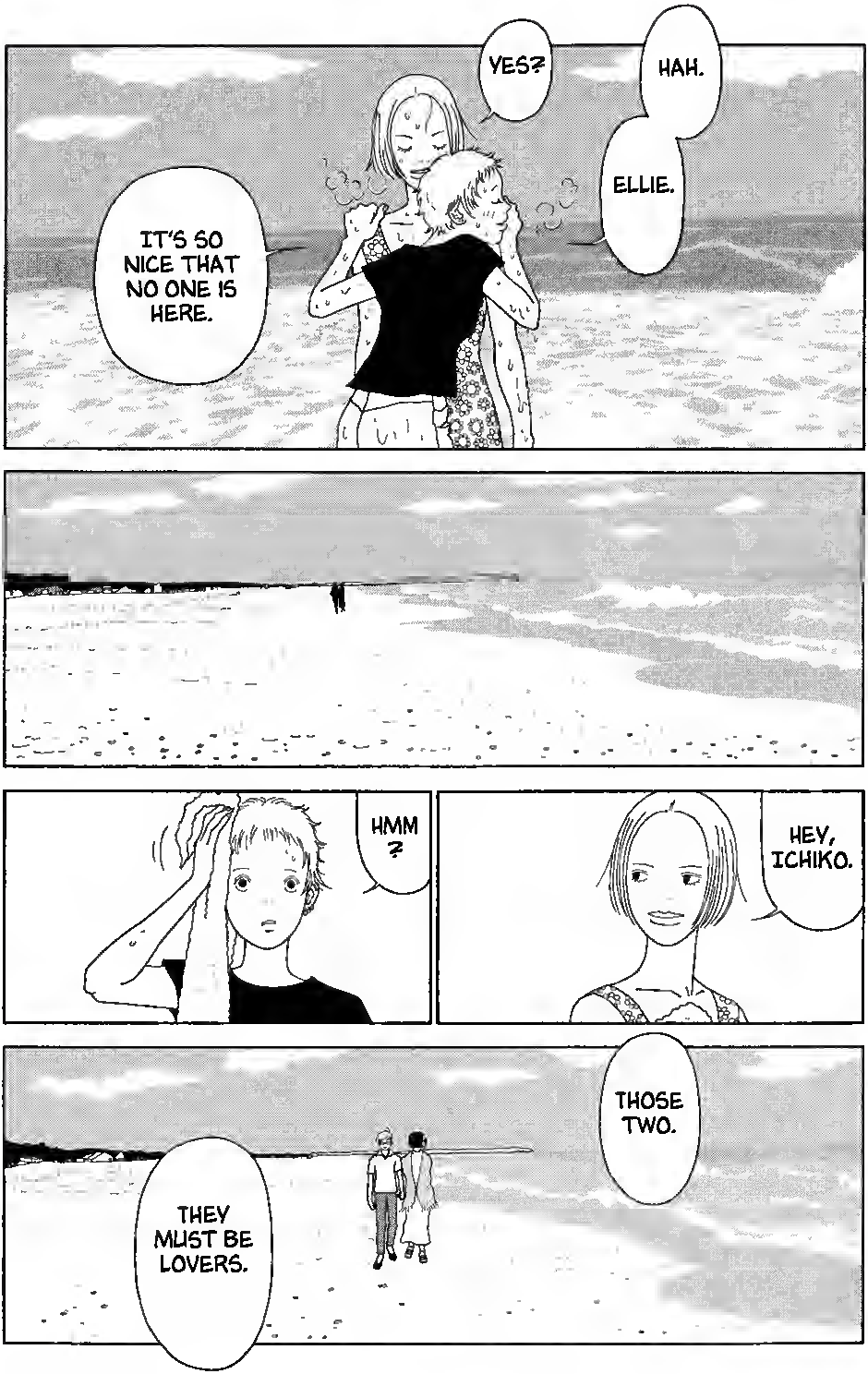

She was a fashion model-turned-handbag designer. She was my inspiration. And the truth is...
...she was a lesbian. I only recently learned it from my dad.

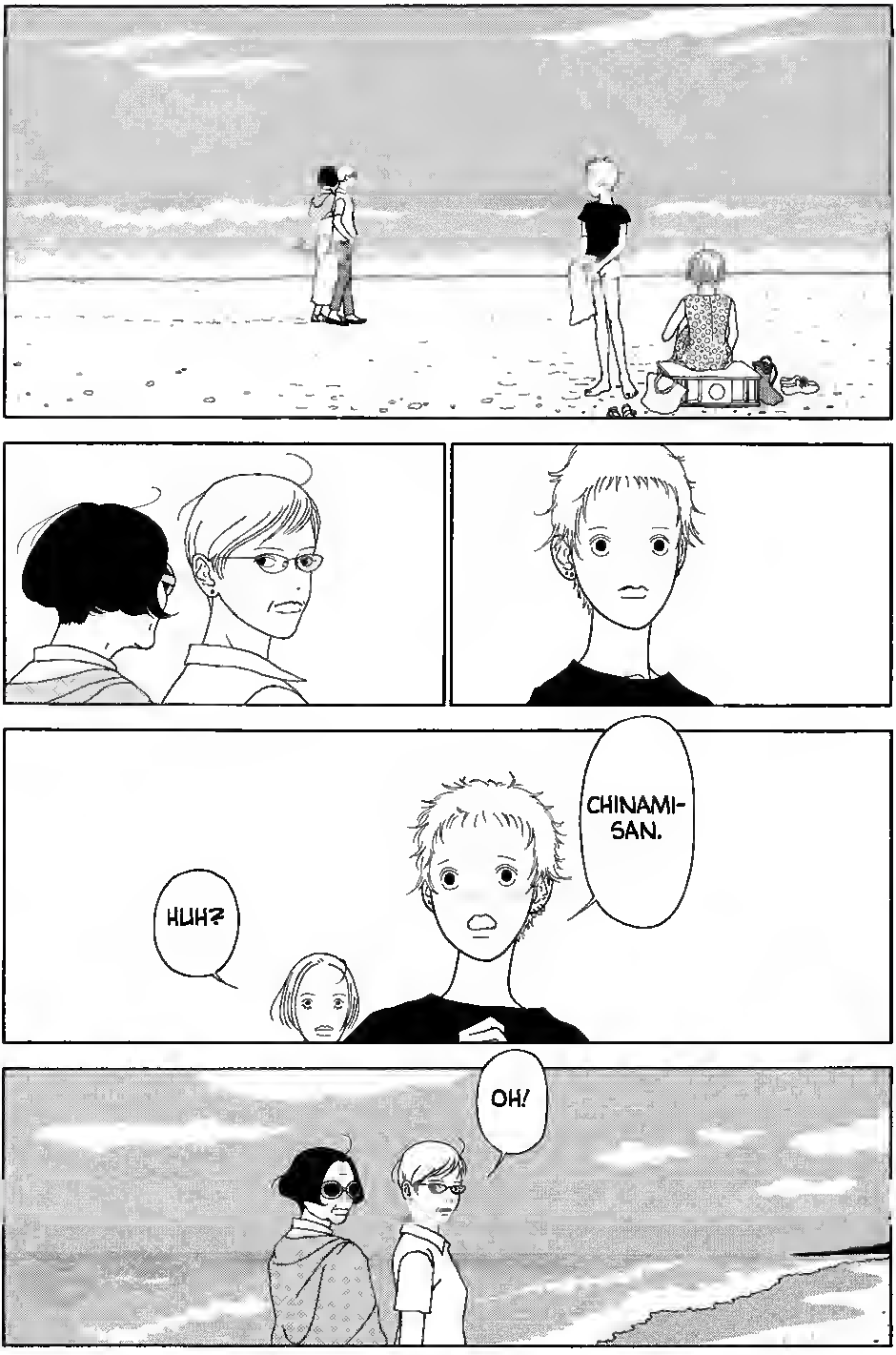
EPHRAIM LEWIS SKIN
There are so many things I want to ask her.
But I can't get a reply.

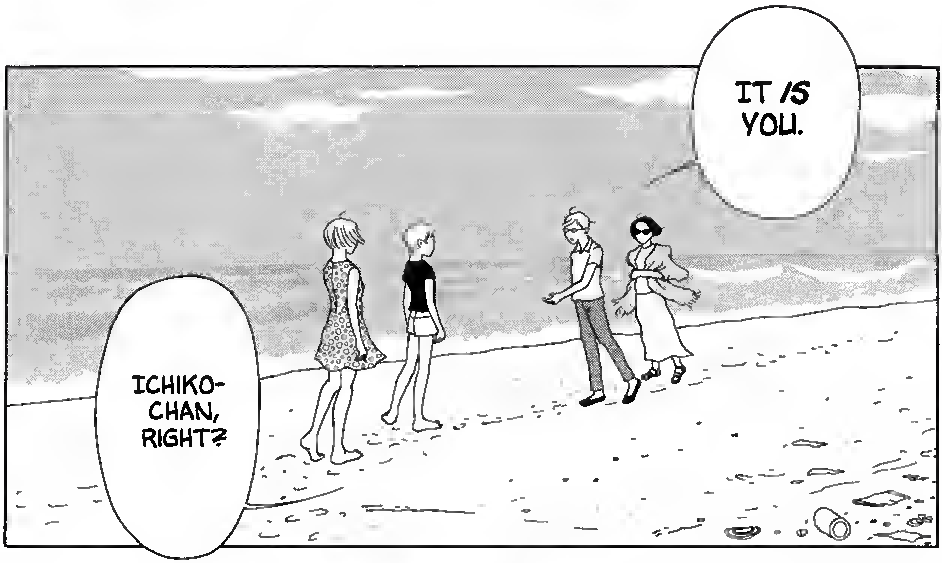

Hey, Mama, guess what? The first person I fell in love with, with all my heart, is a woman. She's three years older and she's a brilliant person, aiming to become a lawyer. It's not that I hate men. It doesn't have to be women, either.

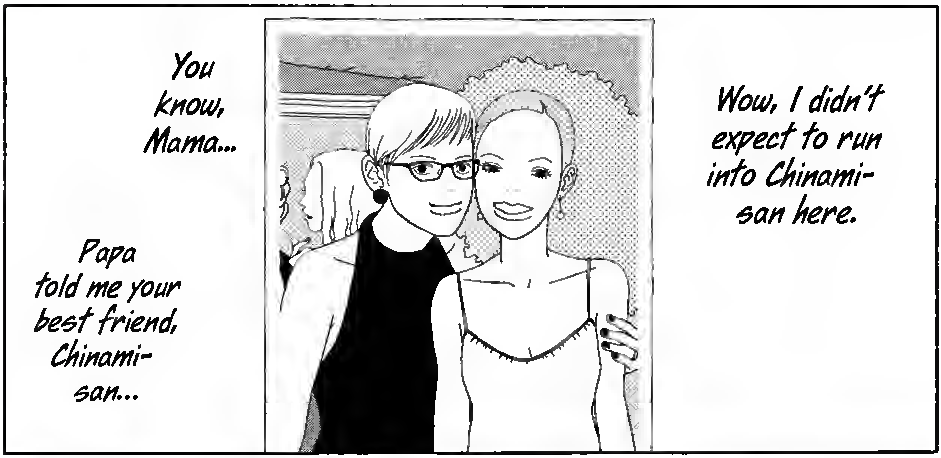

If Ellie were a man...
...I still would have fallen in love with her.

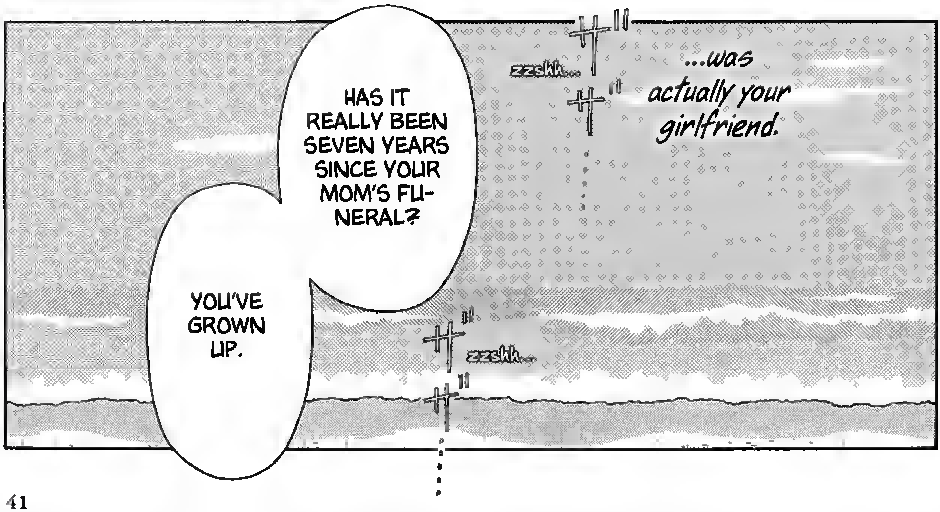

EEK! SO COLD!!
zshh...
BUT IT FEELS NICE.
TAKE THAT, ELLIE!
Splash!
NO.
HEY, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
EEP! GO EASY ON ME!
Splash!
Splash!
Splash!
Aha ha ha!
TAKE THAT! AND THAT!


YES?
HAH.
ELLIE.
IT'S SO NICE THAT NO ONE IS HERE.
HMM?
HEY, ICHIKO.
THOSE TWO.
THEY MUST BE LOVERS.

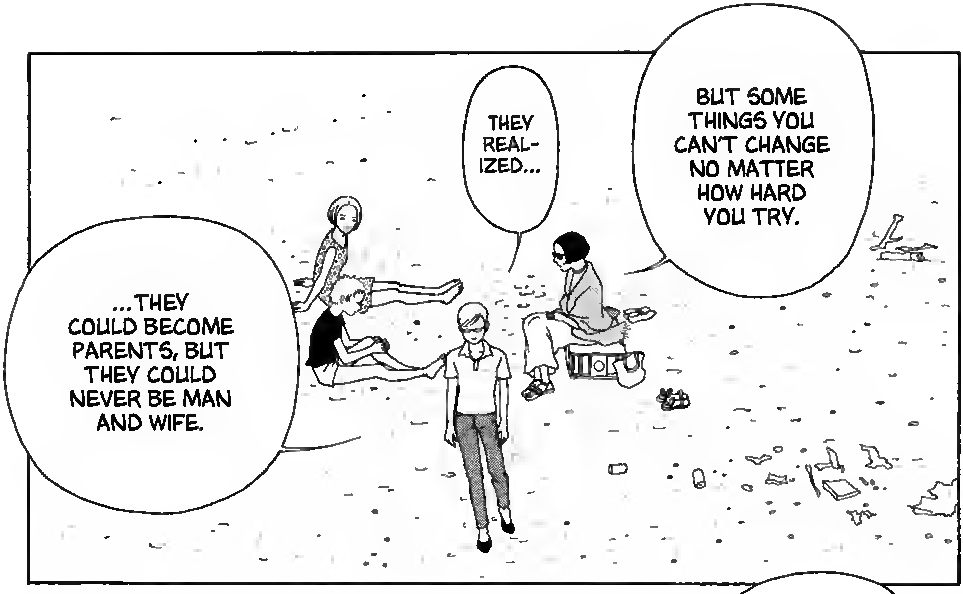

CHINAMI-SAN.
HUH?
OH!

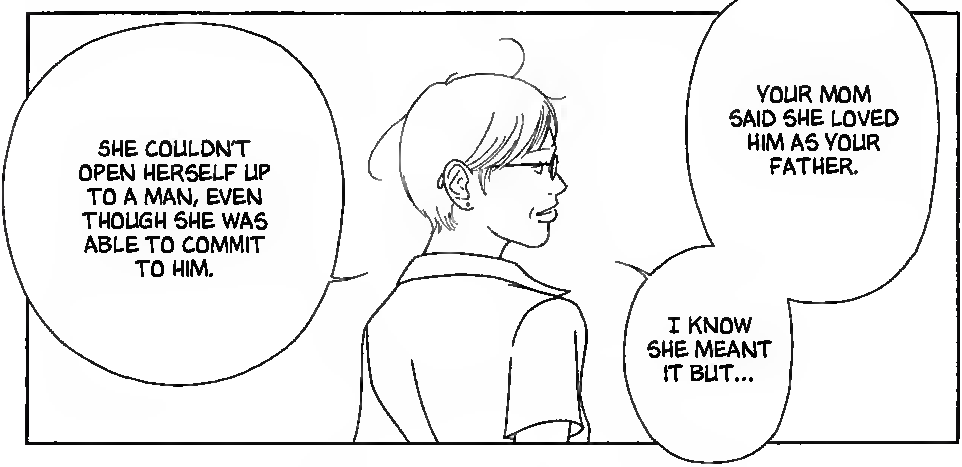

IT IS YOU.
ICHIKO-CHAN, RIGHT?


You know, Mama...
Papa told me your best friend, Chinami-san...
Wow, I didn't expect to run into Chinami-san here.

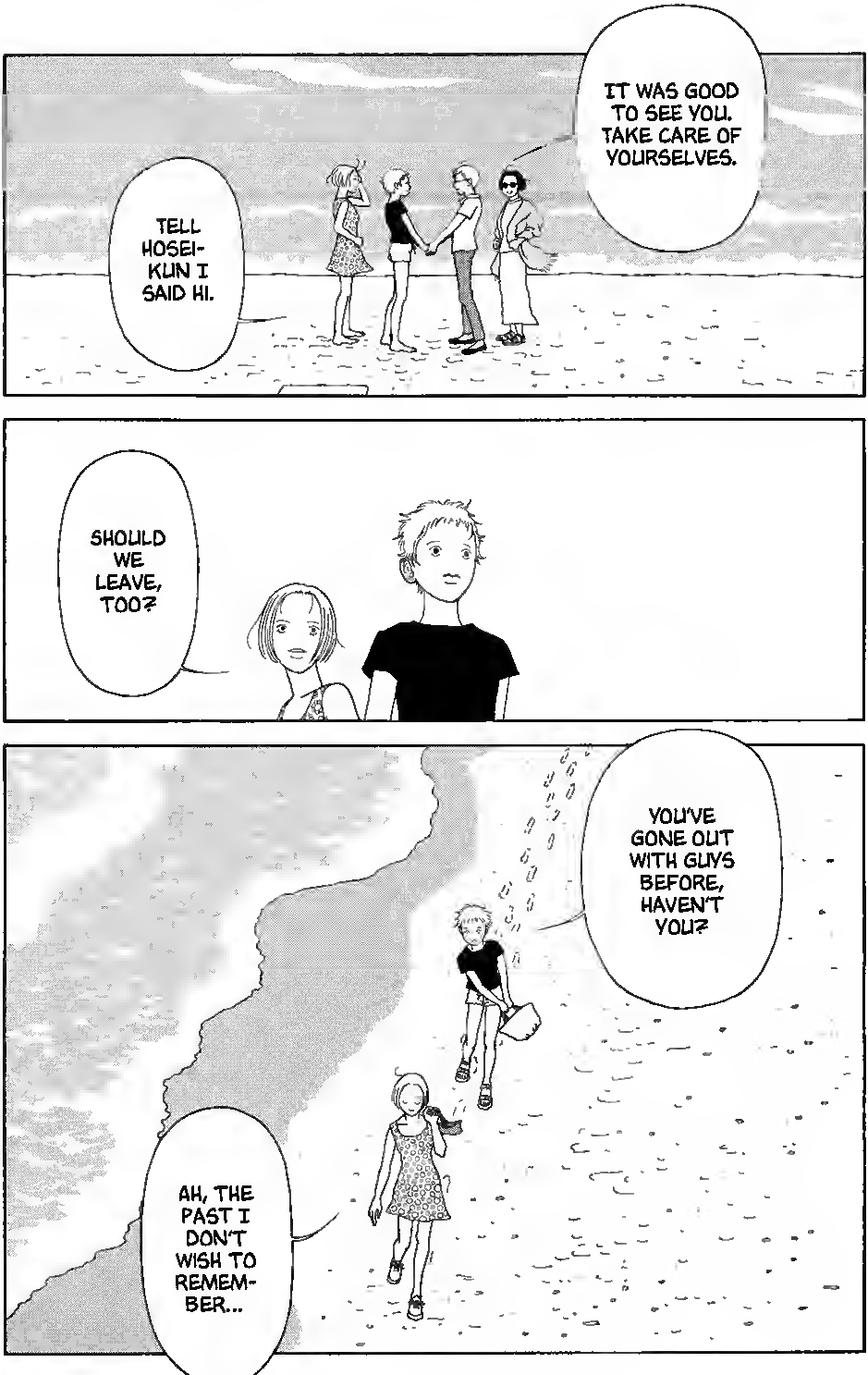

HAS IT REALLY BEEN SEVEN YEARS SINCE YOUR MOM'S FU-NERAL?
YOU'VE GROWN UP.
szszhh...
szszhh...
...was actually your girlfriend.

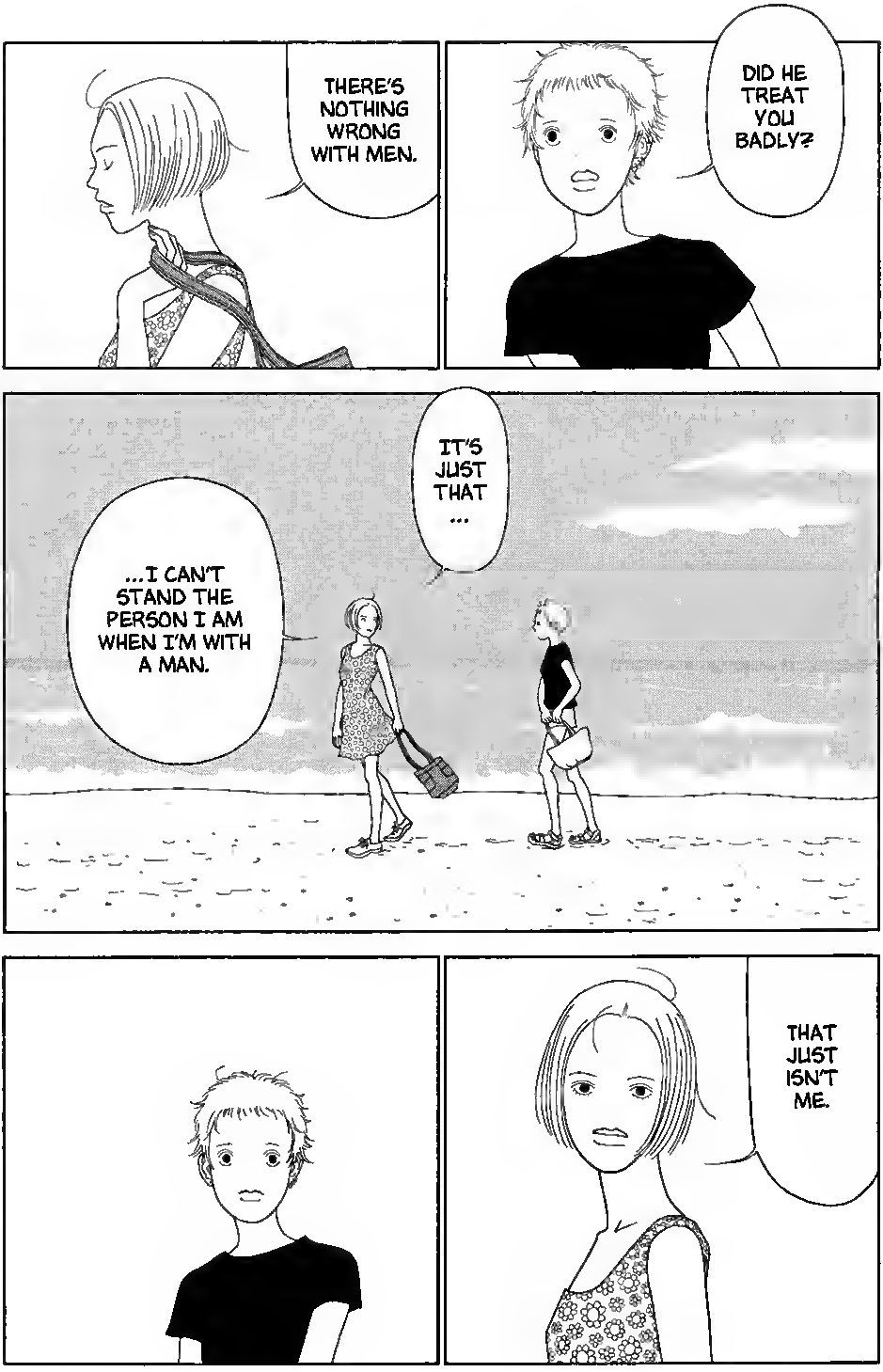
HOW'S HOSEI-KUN DOING? HE'S DONE REALLY WELL FOR HIMSELF AS A REPUTABLE TRANSLATOR.
HE SHOULD BE PROMOTED TO A FULL PROFESSOR-SHIP SOON.
DO YOU KNOW MY DAD, SAEKO-SAN?
WELL, I TAUGHT HIM IN COL-LEGE.
WAIT 'TIL HE FINDS OUT WE'RE SEEING EACH OTHER.
I'M SORRY.
I DECEIVED YOU, TOO.
I SEE.
YOUR PARENTS TRIED SO HARD...
...TO GIVE UP THEIR HOMOSEXU-ALITY FOR YOU.
SO, HE TOLD YOU EVERY-THING.

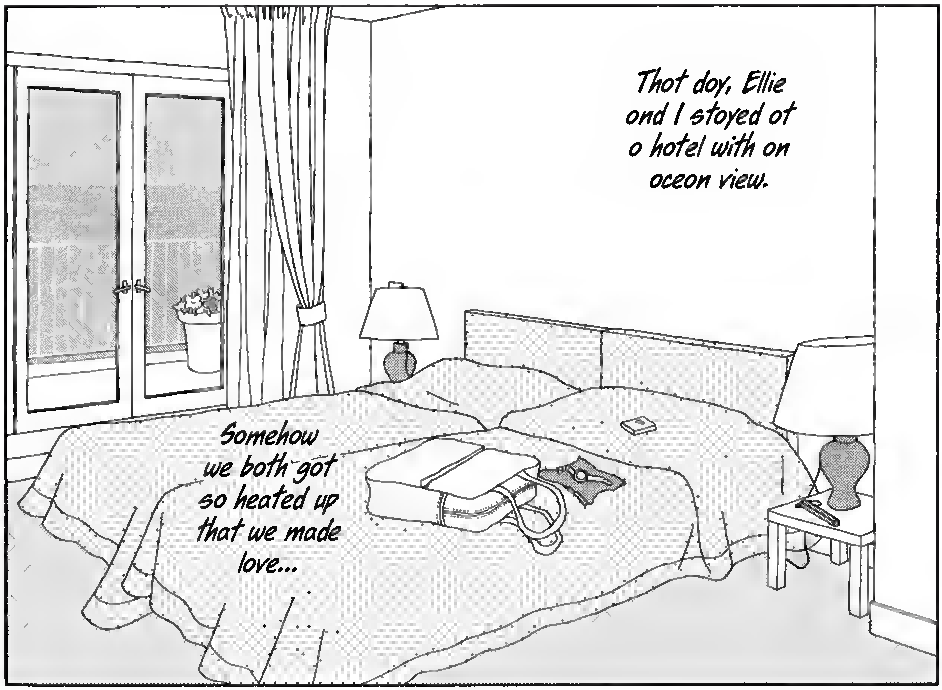

BUT SOME THINGS YOU CAN'T CHANGE NO MATTER HOW HARD YOU TRY.
THEY REAL-IZED...
...THEY COULD BECOME PARENTS, BUT THEY COULD NEVER BE MAN AND WIFE.

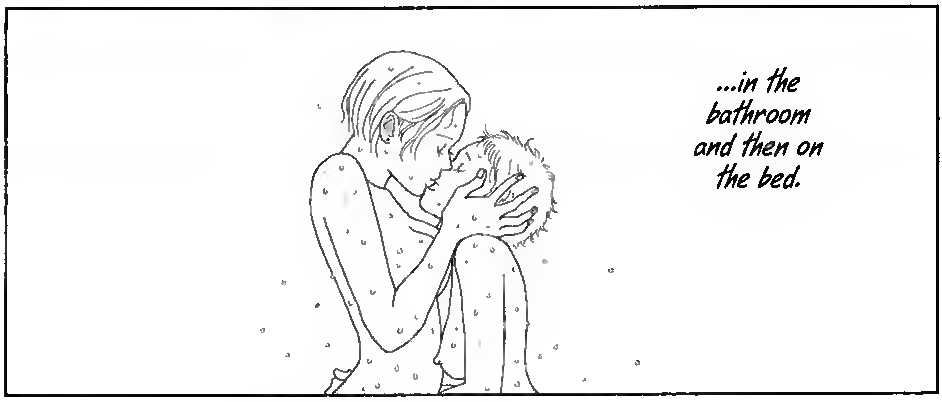

YOUR MOM SAID SHE LOVED HIM AS YOUR FATHER.
I KNOW SHE MEANT IT BUT...
SHE COULDN'T OPEN HERSELF UP TO A MAN, EVEN THOUGH SHE WAS ABLE TO COMMIT TO HIM.

PEOPLE ARE DIFFICULT CREA-TURES.
THE ONE YOU LOVE AND THE ONE YOU CAN OPEN UP TO ARE NOT ALWAYS THE SAME.

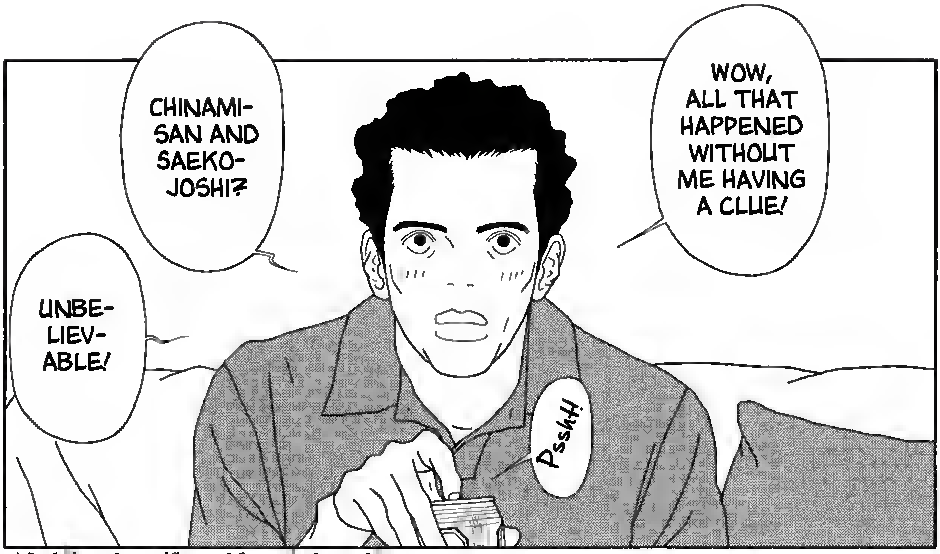

IT WAS GOOD TO SEE YOU. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELVES.
TELL HOSEI-KUN I SAID HI.
SHOULD WE LEAVE, TOO?
YOU'VE GONE OUT WITH GUYS BEFORE, HAVEN'T YOU?
AH, THE PAST I DON'T WISH TO REMEM-BER...


THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH MEN.
DID HE TREAT YOU BADLY?
IT'S JUST THAT ...
...I CAN'T STAND THE PERSON I AM WHEN I'M WITH A MAN.
THAT JUST ISN'T ME.

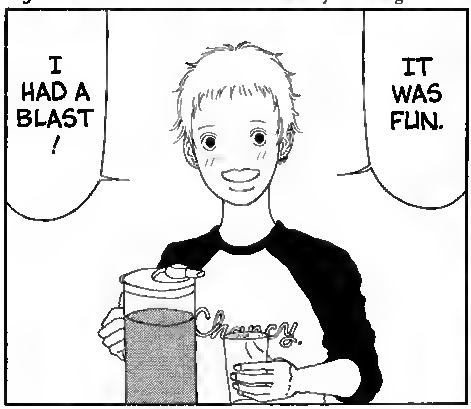


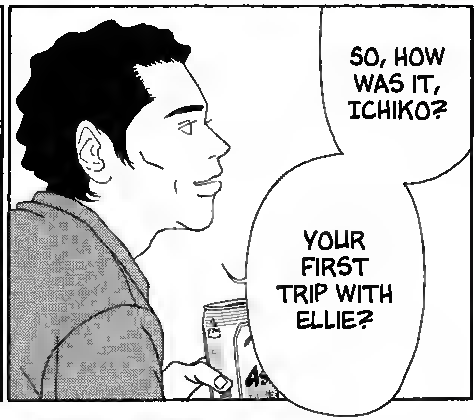


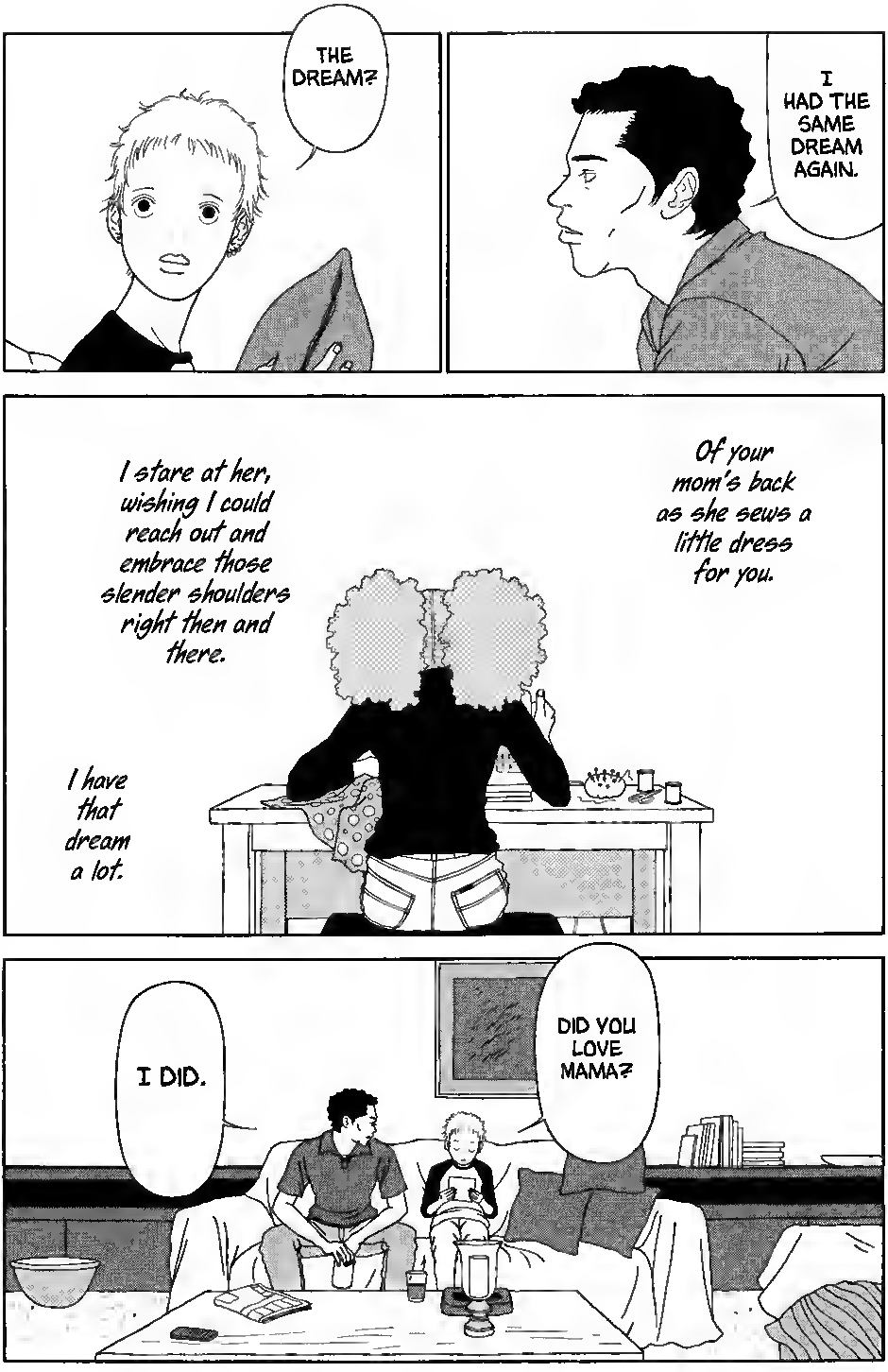
When I got home the next night, Papa was listening to Ephraim Lewis.

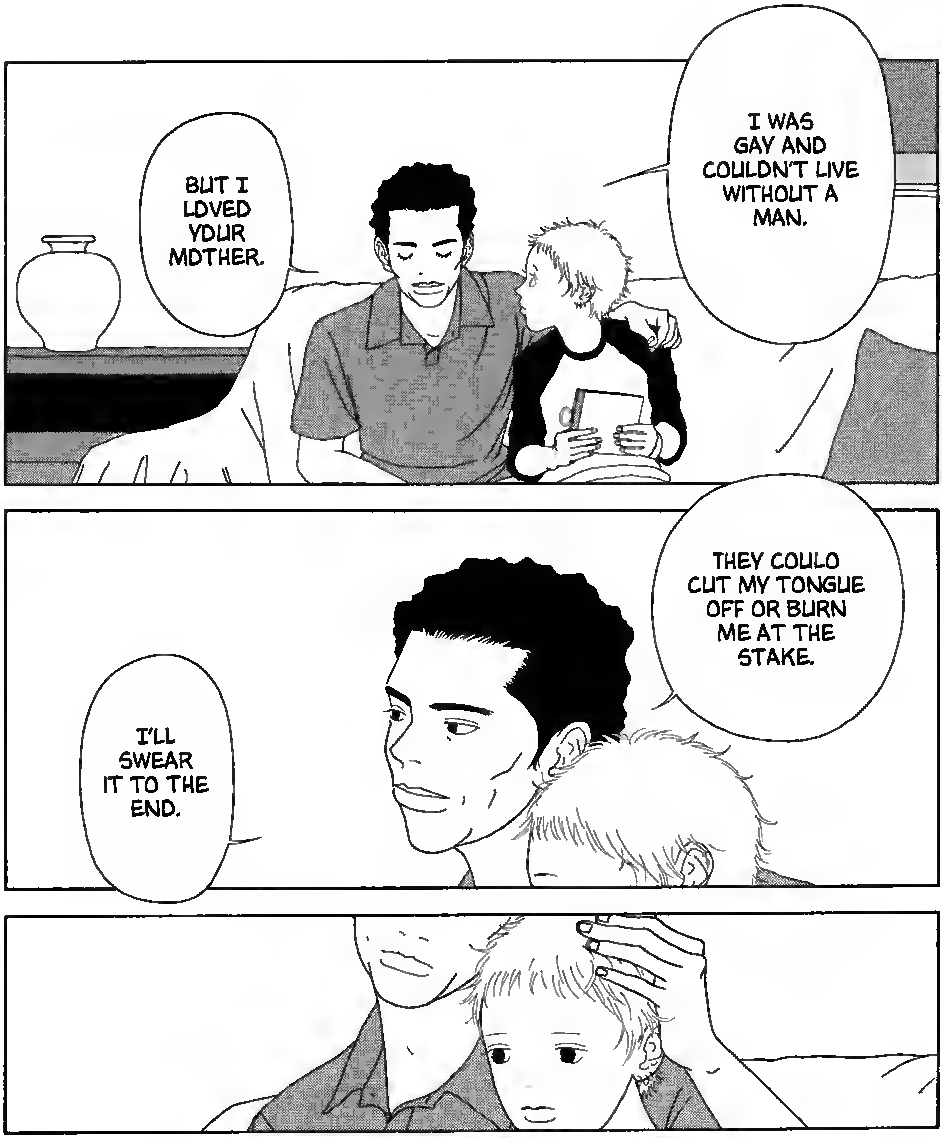


* *Joshi* is an honorific used for actively working women.





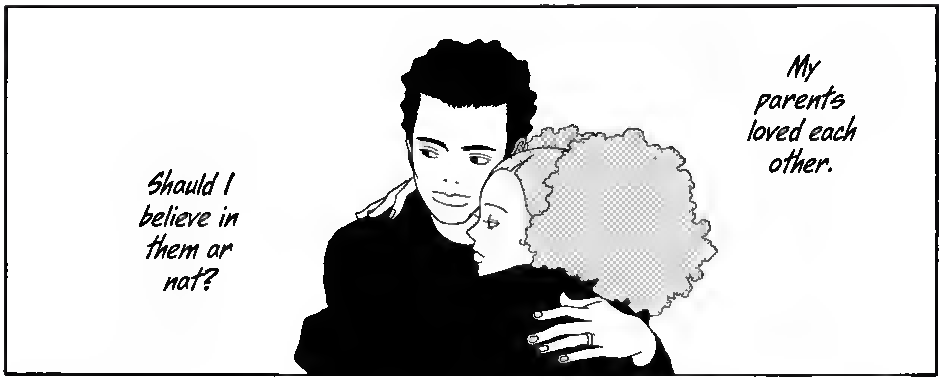

THE DREAM?
I HAD THE SAME DREAM AGAIN.
I stare at her, wishing I could reach out and embrace those slender shoulders right then and there.
Of your mom's back as she sews a little dress for you.
I have that dream a lot.
I DID.
DID YOU LOVE MAMA?

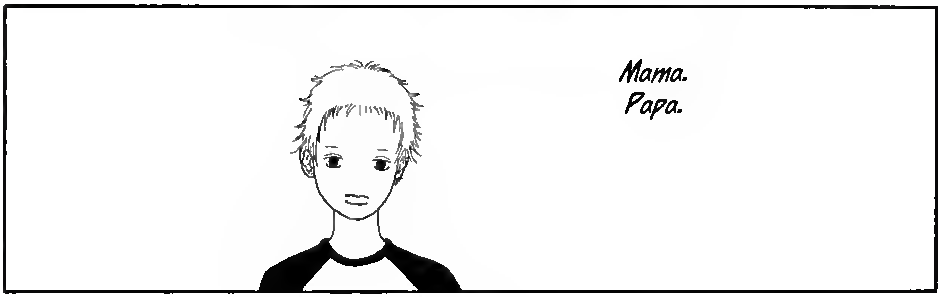

BUT I LOVED YOUR MOTHER.
I WAS GAY AND COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT A MAN.
I'LL SWEAR IT TO THE END.
THEY COULD CUT MY TONGUE OFF OR BURN ME AT THE STAKE.

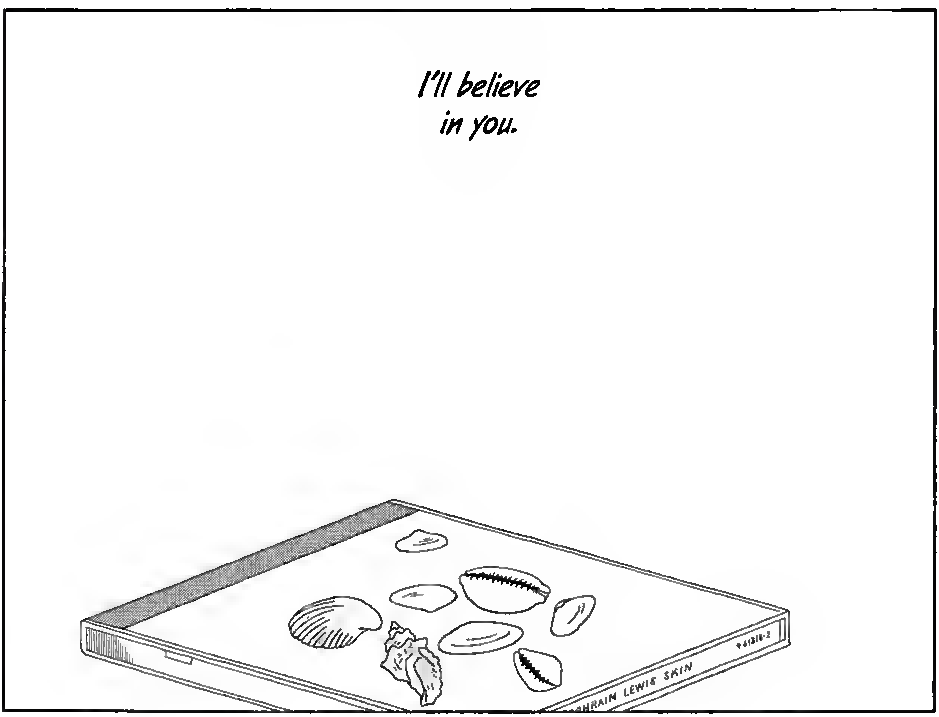
...to believe in them or not.

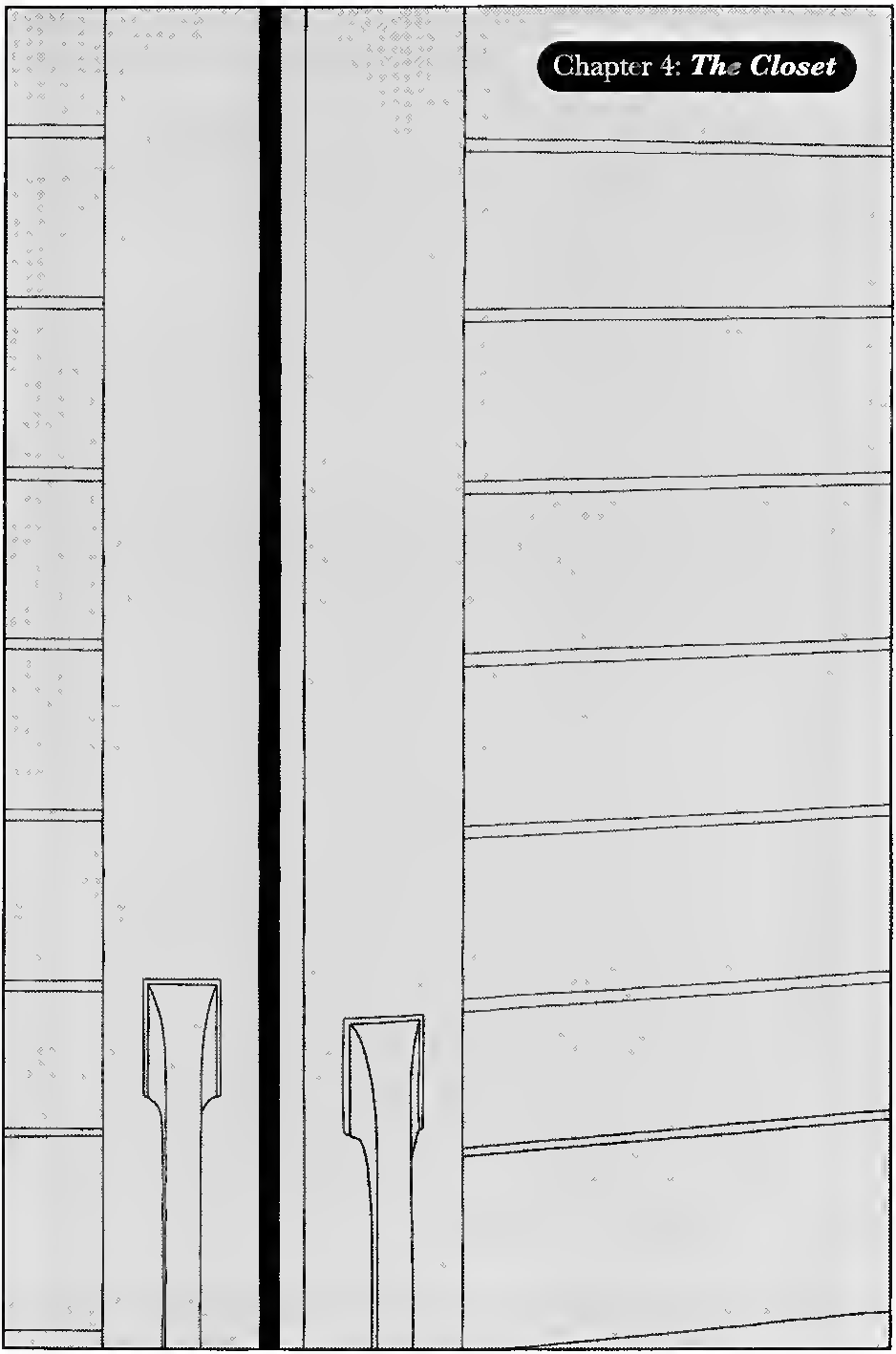
I could only choose...

I don't know what's true or what's a lie...


My parents loved each other.
Should I believe in them or not?


Mama.
Papa.

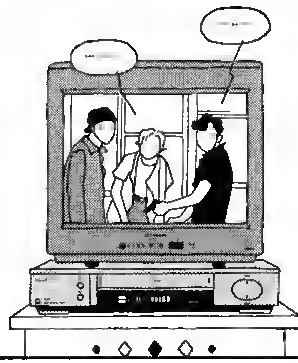

I'll believe in you.


Chapter 4: *The Closet*

Hi, there! I'm Ichiko. Oh, you probably know that by now.

So anyway, I recently became aware that I'm a lesbian!

I thought it was just happenstance that Ellie is a woman, but I was wrong.

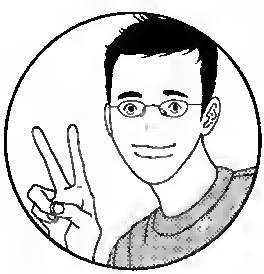


Ellie could never be a man and a man could never be Ellie.

I love her and she always makes me feel good. Making love to a woman is natural to me.

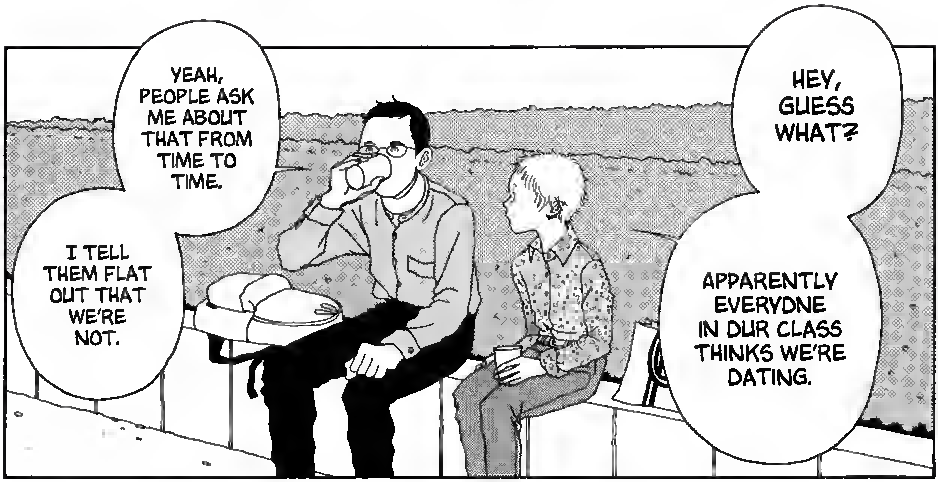
But it's very difficult to make everyone understand this. Only Dad, Ellie and Take-chan, my classmat_ at my language school, know about my sexuality.

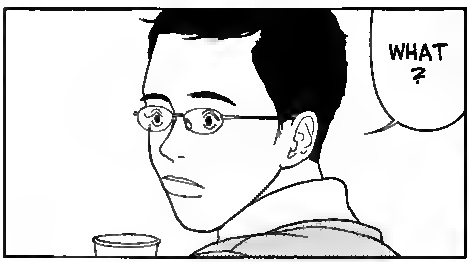
Take-chan, who enrolled after going to college, is four years my senior and is aiming to become a translator, too. And...

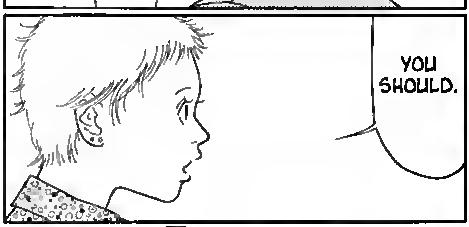


...he's gay.

I WAS PRETTY SURPRISED, TO BE HONEST. IT'S NOT LIKE THAT'S A BIG HANG-OUT SPOT FOR GAYS AND LESBIANS.
I FEEL COMFORT-ABLE AROUND YOU.
I WAS LIKE, "WHAT'S TAKE-CHAN DOING HERE?"
IF I HADN'T MET YOU RIGHT THEN AND THERE, I WOULD'VE HAD THE WORST SCHOOL LIFE.
MAYBE I'LL FEEL FREE IF I COME OUT...
YOU KNOW, IT'S TOUGH TO LISTEN TO GUYS TALK ABOUT WOMEN ALL THE TIME.
I FEEL LIKE I'M TRAPPED IN A CRAMPED CLOSET.
BUT I DON'T HAVE THE COUR-AGE.

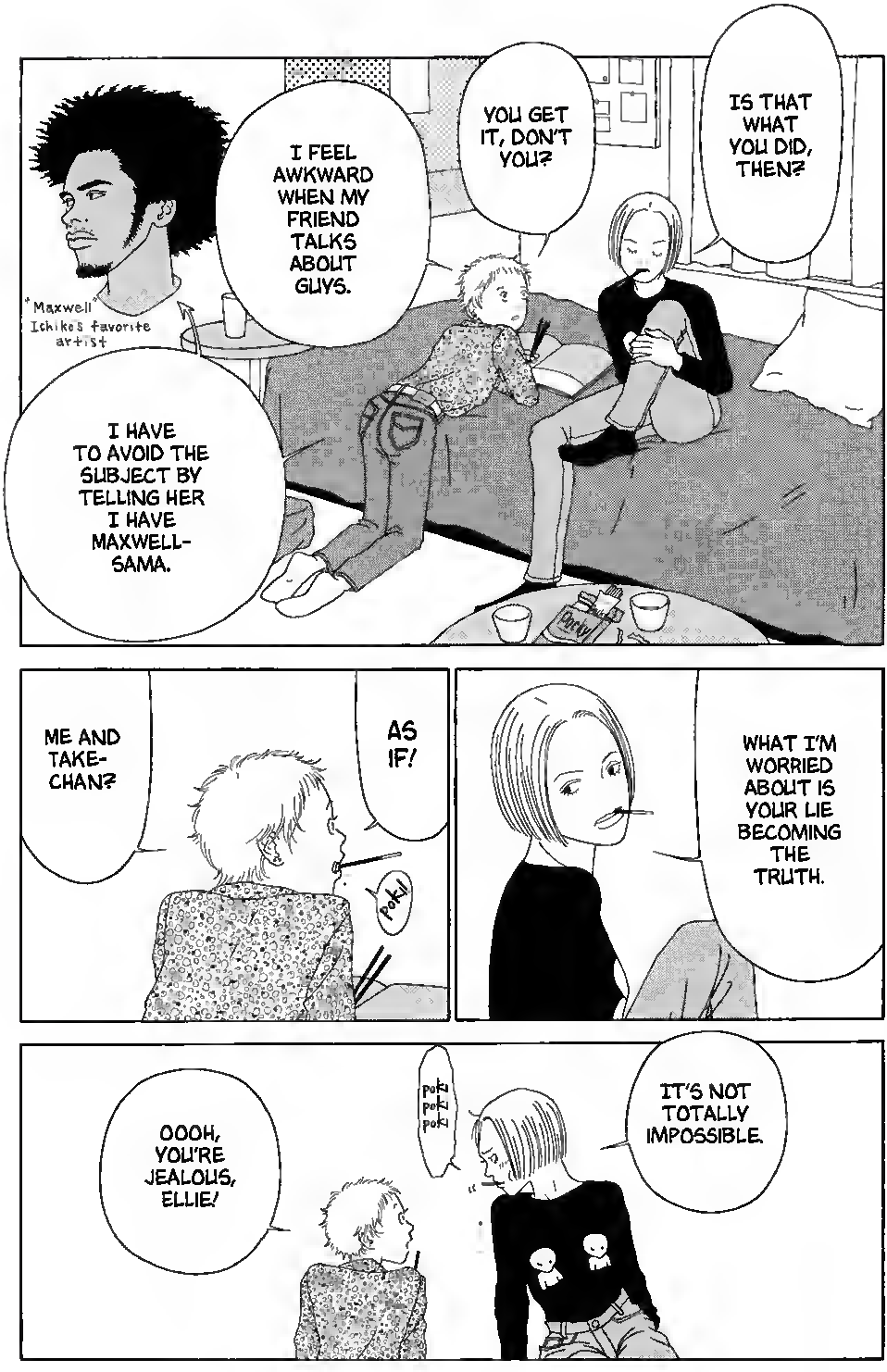

HEY, GUESS WHAT?
APPARENTLY EVERYONE IN OUR CLASS THINKS WE'RE DATING.
YEAH, PEOPLE ASK ME ABOUT THAT FROM TIME TO TIME.
I TELL THEM FLAT OUT THAT WE'RE NOT.

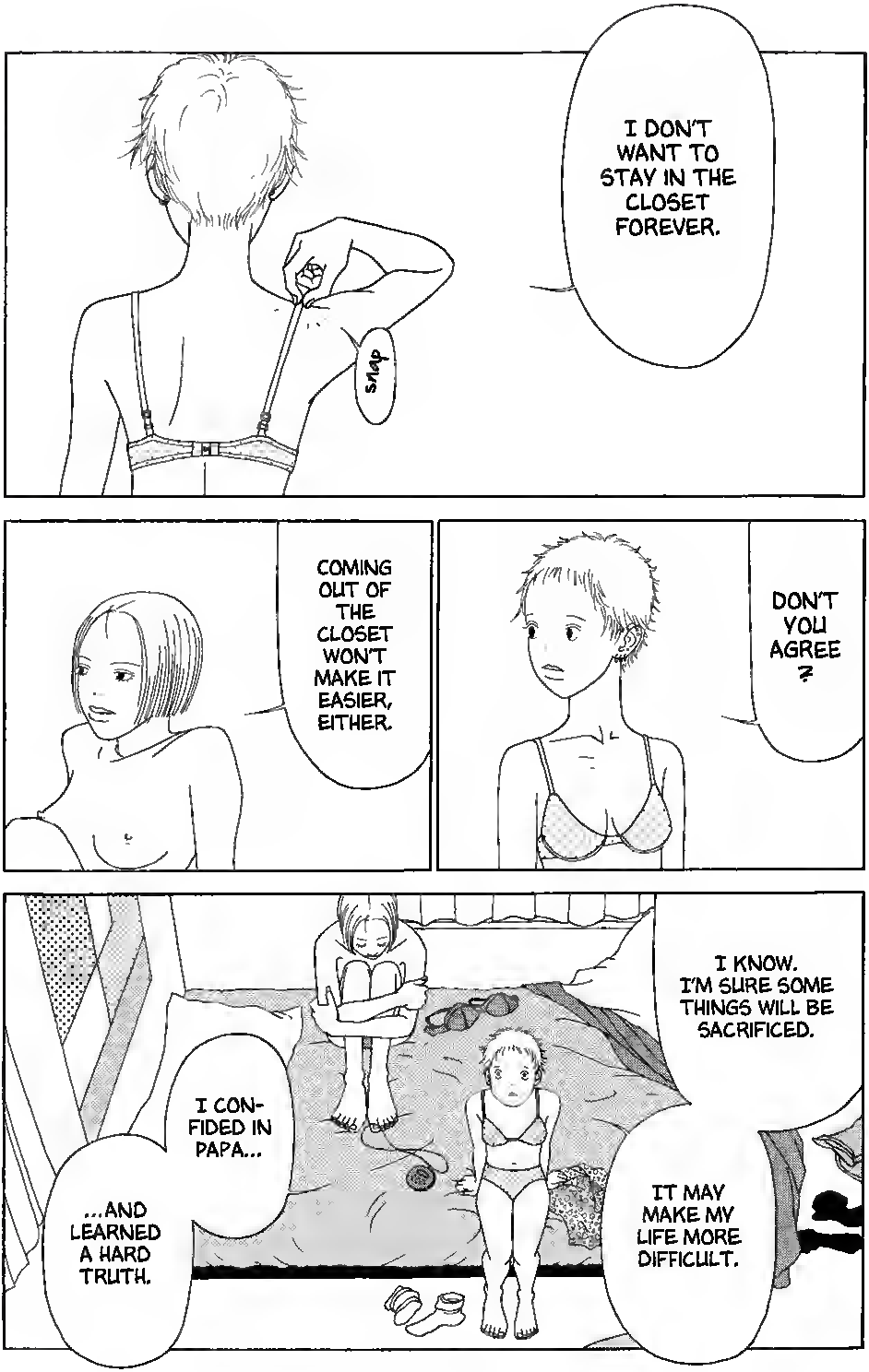

WHAT?

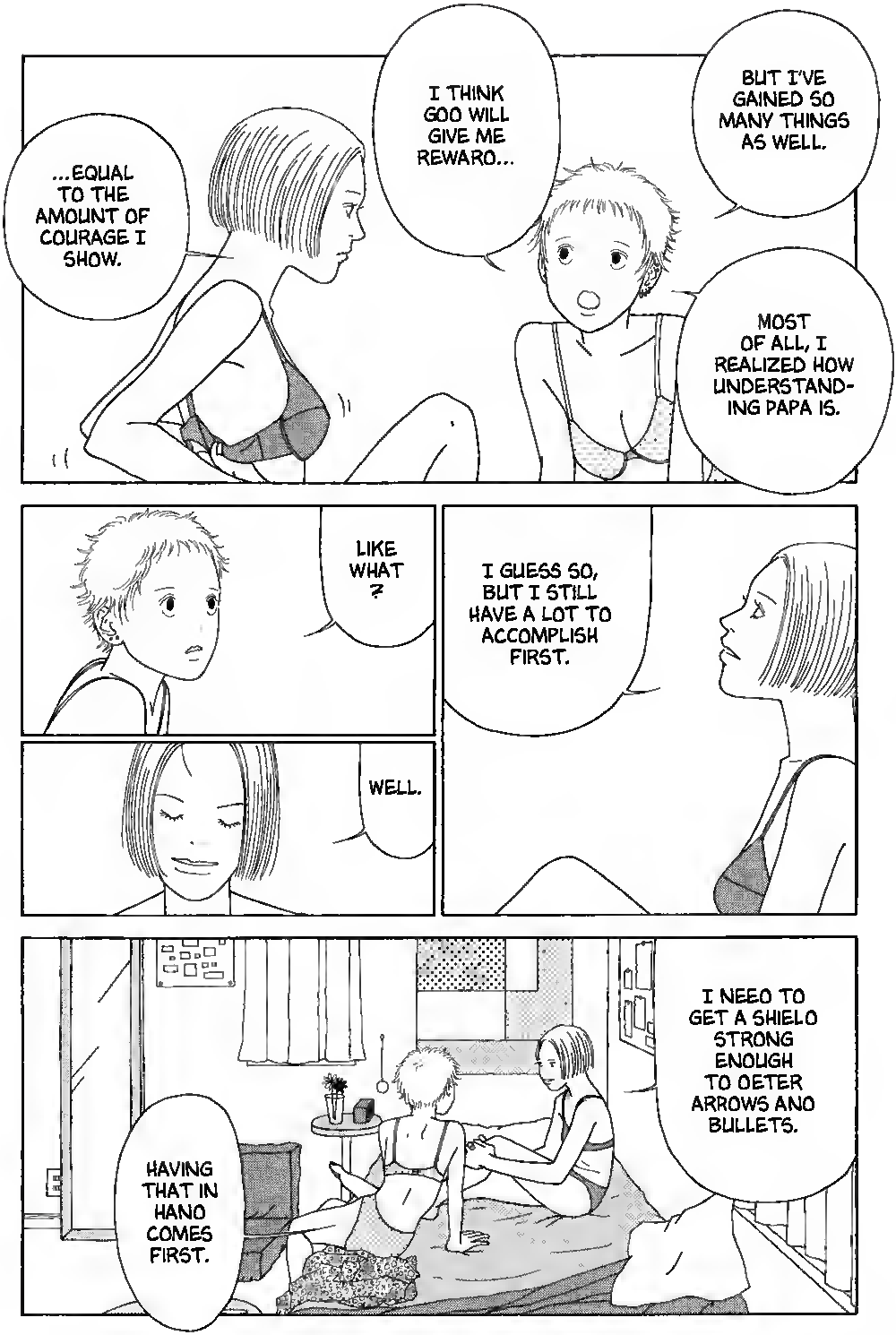

YOU SHOULD.

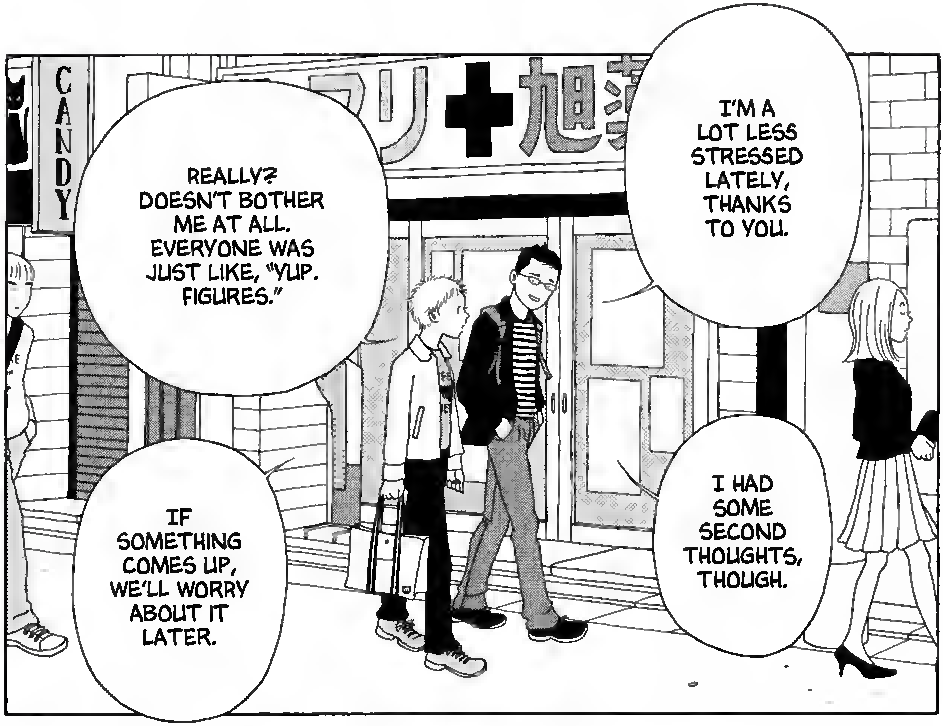
WHY DON'T YOU SAY WE ARE?

I DON'T MIND, IF IT TAKES SOME PRESSURE OFF YOU.
THOSE GUYS WOULD FORGIVE YOU BEING A LITTLE ANTI-SOCIAL...
...IF YOU HAD A GIRL-FRIEND.

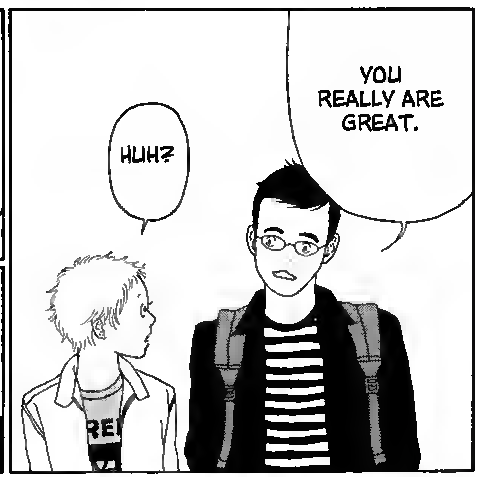

IS THAT WHAT YOU DID, THEN?
YOU GET IT, DON'T YOU?
I FEEL AWKWARD WHEN MY FRIEND TALKS ABOUT GUYS.
*Maxwell Ichiko's favorite artist
I HAVE TO AVOID THE SUBJECT BY TELLING HER I HAVE MAXWELL-SAMA.
Pocky
AS IF!
ME AND TAKE-CHAN?
Poki!
WHAT I'M WORRIED ABOUT IS YOUR LIE BECOMING THE TRUTH.
IT'S NOT TOTALLY IMPOSSIBLE.
Poki Poki Poki
OOOH, YOU'RE JEALOUS, ELLIE!

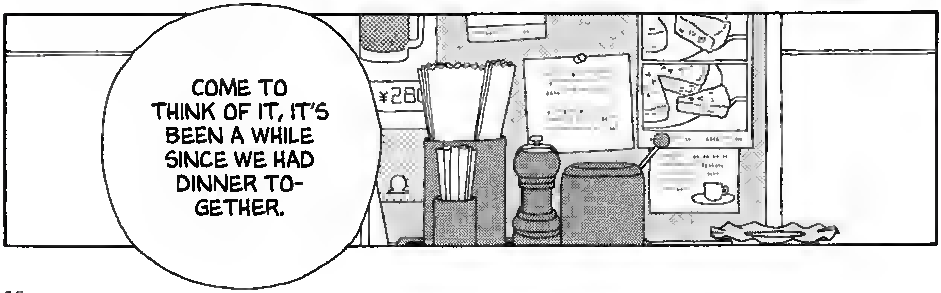

I DON'T WANT TO STAY IN THE CLOSET FOREVER.
snap
COMING OUT OF THE CLOSET WON'T MAKE IT EASIER, EITHER.
DON'T YOU AGREE?
I KNOW. I'M SURE SOME THINGS WILL BE SACRIFICED.
IT MAY MAKE MY LIFE MORE DIFFICULT.
I CONFIDED IN PAPA...
...AND LEARNED A HARD TRUTH.


...EQUAL TO THE AMOUNT OF COURAGE I SHOW.
I THINK GOO WILL GIVE ME REWARO...
BUT I'VE GAINED SO MANY THINGS AS WELL.
MOST OF ALL, I REALIZED HOW UNDERSTAND-ING PAPA IS.
LIKE WHAT ?
I GUESS SO, BUT I STILL HAVE A LOT TO ACCOMPLISH FIRST.
WELL.
I NEEO TO GET A SHIELO STRONG ENOUGH TO OETER ARROWS ANO BULLETS.
HAVING THAT IN HANO COMES FIRST.


CANDY
I'M A LOT LESS STRESSED LATELY, THANKS TO YOU.
REALLY? DOESN'T BOTHER ME AT ALL. EVERYONE WAS JUST LIKE, "YUP. FIGURES."
I HAD SOME SECOND THOUGHTS, THOUGH.
IF SOMETHING COMES UP, WE'LL WORRY ABOUT IT LATER.

YOU'RE THE ONLY GIRL I EVER LIKED.

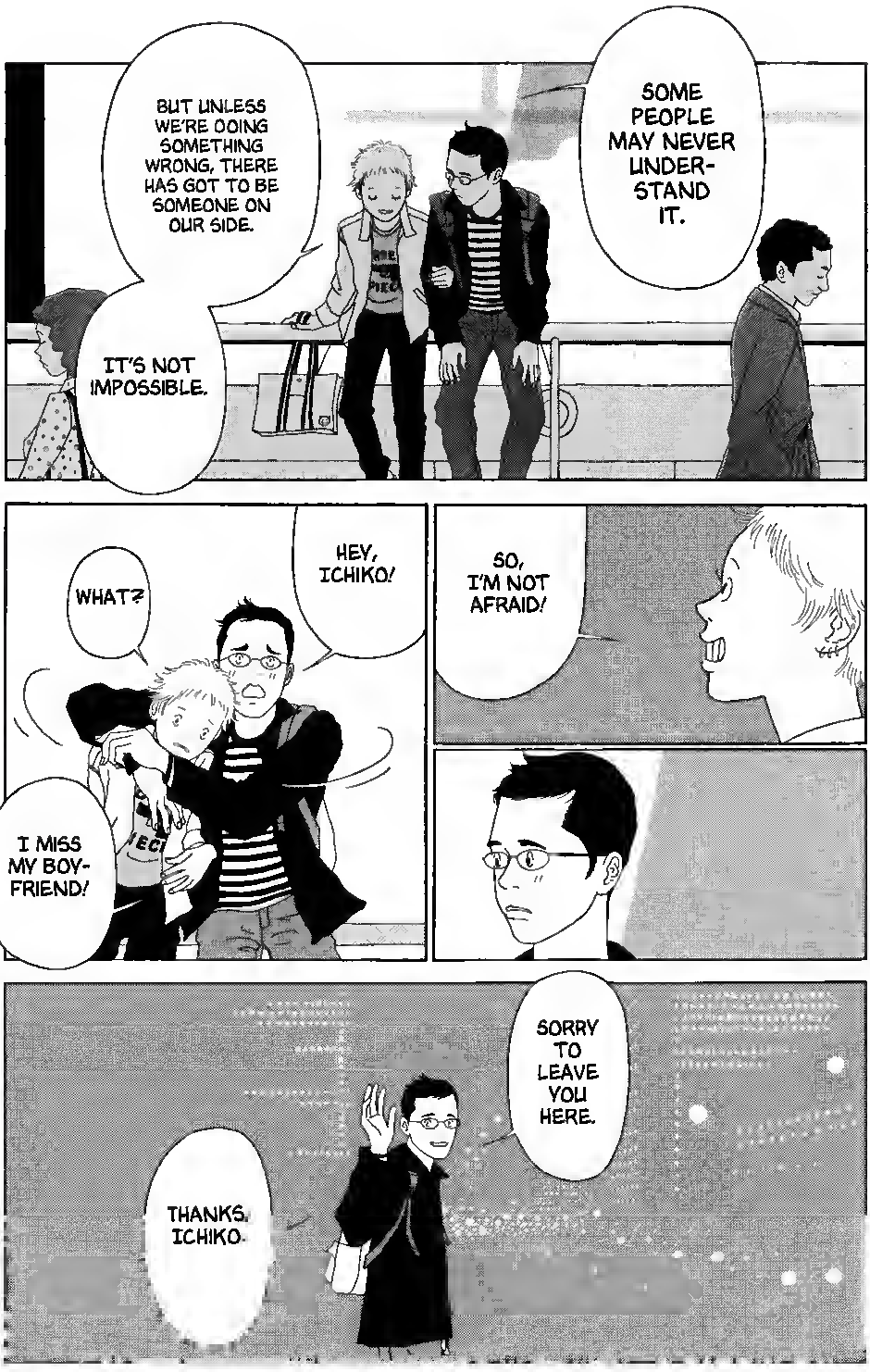

YOU REALLY ARE GREAT.
HUH?

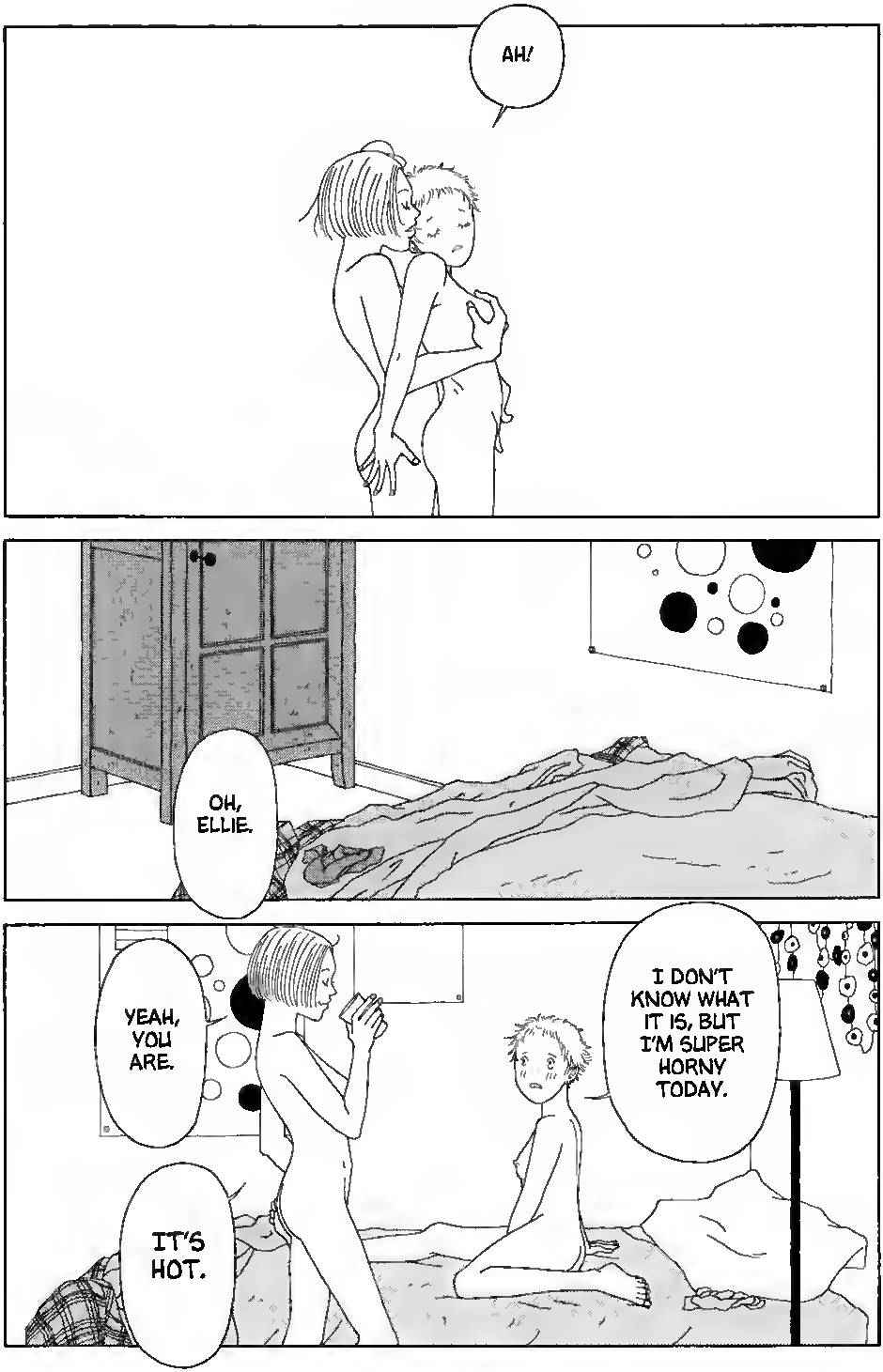

COME TO THINK OF IT, IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE WE HAD DINNER TO-GETHER.

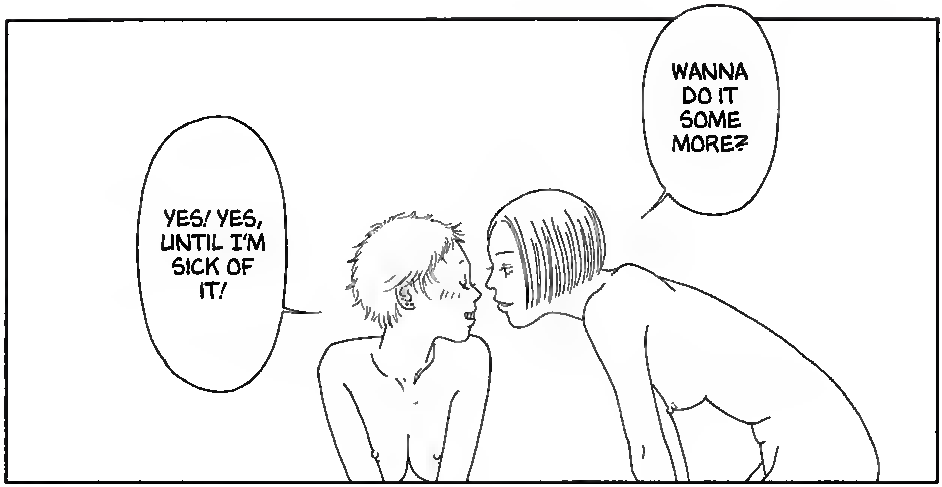
SPEAK FOR YOURSELF.
YOU'VE BEEN BUSY WITH ALL YOUR DATES.
WHY? WHAT DID HE DO?
YOU KNOW HAYASHI IN OUR CLASS? YOU'VE GOT TO WATCH OUT FOR HIM.
I KNOW, RIGHT?
HE NEVER SHOWS INTEREST IN CHICKS AT ALL.
HE'S A FAG.
IT WAS A MAGAZINE WITH A NAKED DUDE SMACK ON THE COVER!
THE OTHER DAY, I HAPPENED TO SIT BEHIND HIM AND SAW SOMETHING NASTY WHEN HE PULLED A TEXTBOOK OUT OF HIS BAG.

NO WAY! ARE YOU SERIOUS? GROSS. WHAT A PERV.
OO HOMOS REALIZE WHAT THEY'RE DOING?
YOU HAVE TO WONDER.
NO, THEY DON'T. THAT'S WHY THEY'RE PERVERTS.
LET'S GO, TAKE-CHAN. I FINISHED MY MEAL.
TAKE-CHAN!
THEY SHOULDN'T DRESS LIKE NORMAL MEN.
SHOULD THEY WEAR SKIRTS AND STUFF? HEH HEH HEH!
TAKE-CHAN...

THEY SAY HORRIBLE THINGS.
BUT THAT'S HOW MOST PEOPLE PICTURE US.
THAT'S WHY WE ALWAYS STAY IN THE CLOSET NERVOUSLY HOLDING OUR BREATH.
IT SOUNDS PATHETIC, BUT THAT'S ALL IT TAKES TO MAKE ME CRINGE.
BUT I STILL HEARD IT THAT WAY.
THEY WEREN'T TALKING ABOUT ME.
IT'S AWFUL TO LIVE IN FEAR.
AH.
TAKE-CHAN...
ALL WE DID IS FALL IN LOVE WITH SOMEONE.
WE'RE JUST LOVING THE ONE WE LOVE.


BUT UNLESS WE'RE DOING SOMETHING WRONG, THERE HAS GOT TO BE SOMEONE ON OUR SIDE.
IT'S NOT IMPOSSIBLE.
SOME PEOPLE MAY NEVER UNDER-STAND IT.
HEY, ICHIKO!
WHAT?
I MISS MY BOY-FRIEND!
SO, I'M NOT AFRAID!
SORRY TO LEAVE YOU HERE.
THANKS, ICHIKO.

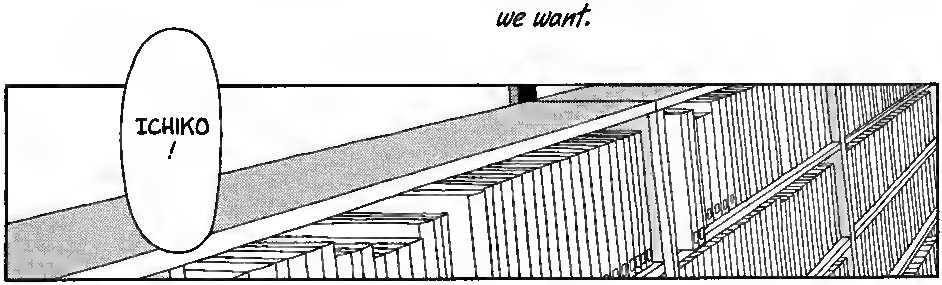

AH!
OH, ELLIE.
YEAH, YOU ARE.
IT'S HOT.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS, BUT I'M SUPER HORNY TODAY.

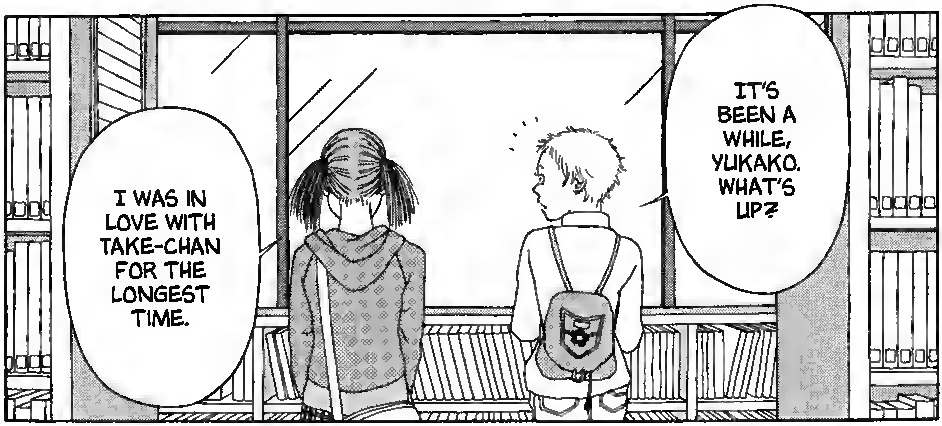


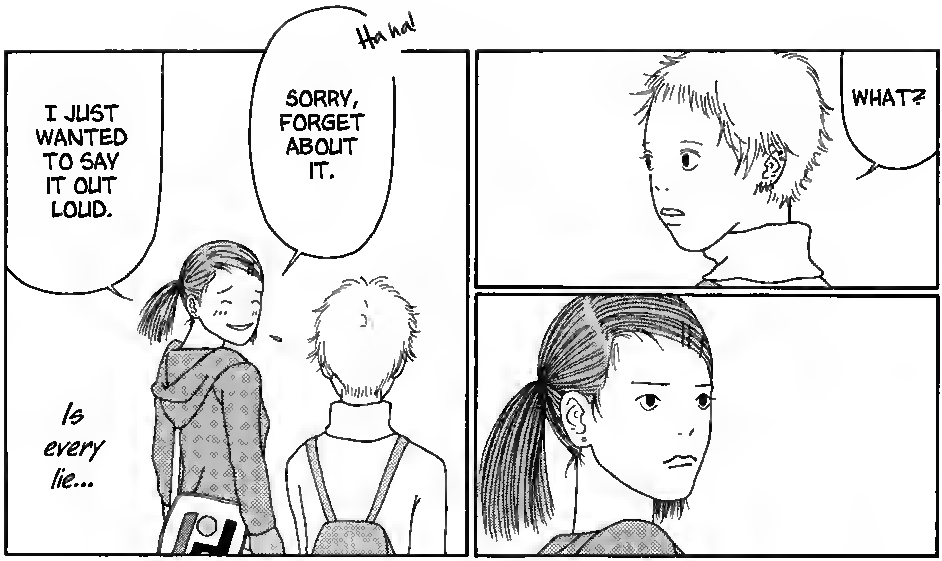
A little voice whispered to me that I should let things stay this way.

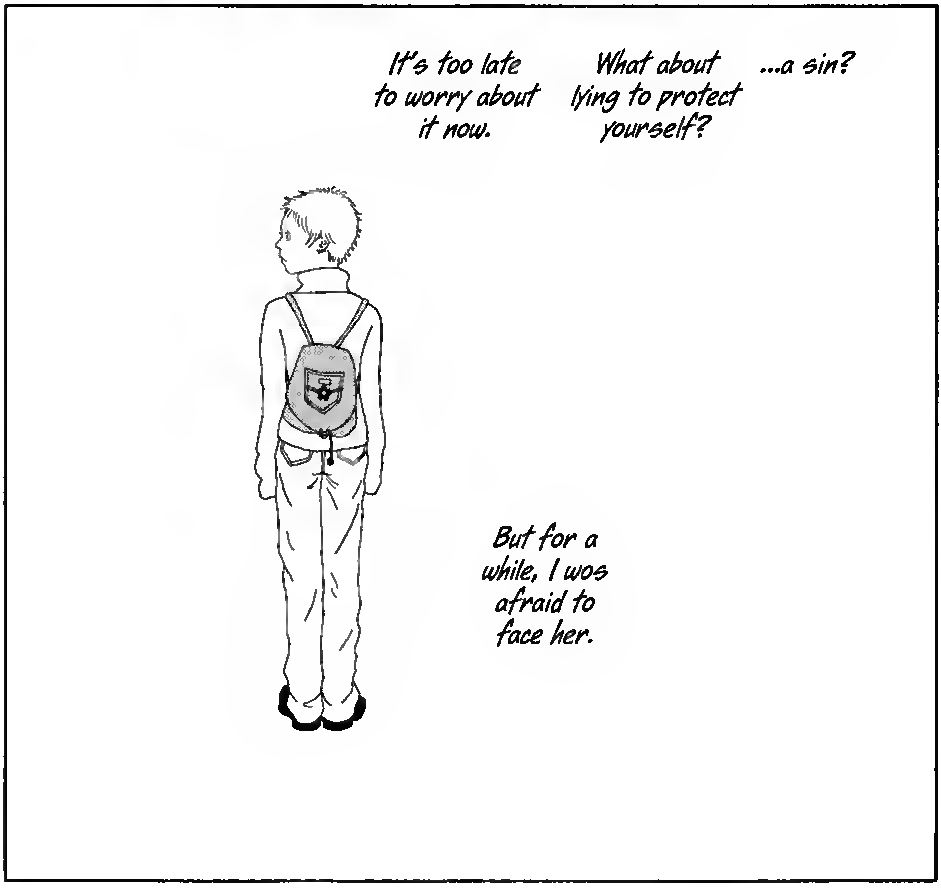
Our closet is small and cramped, but in its confines, we can safely do whatever we want.

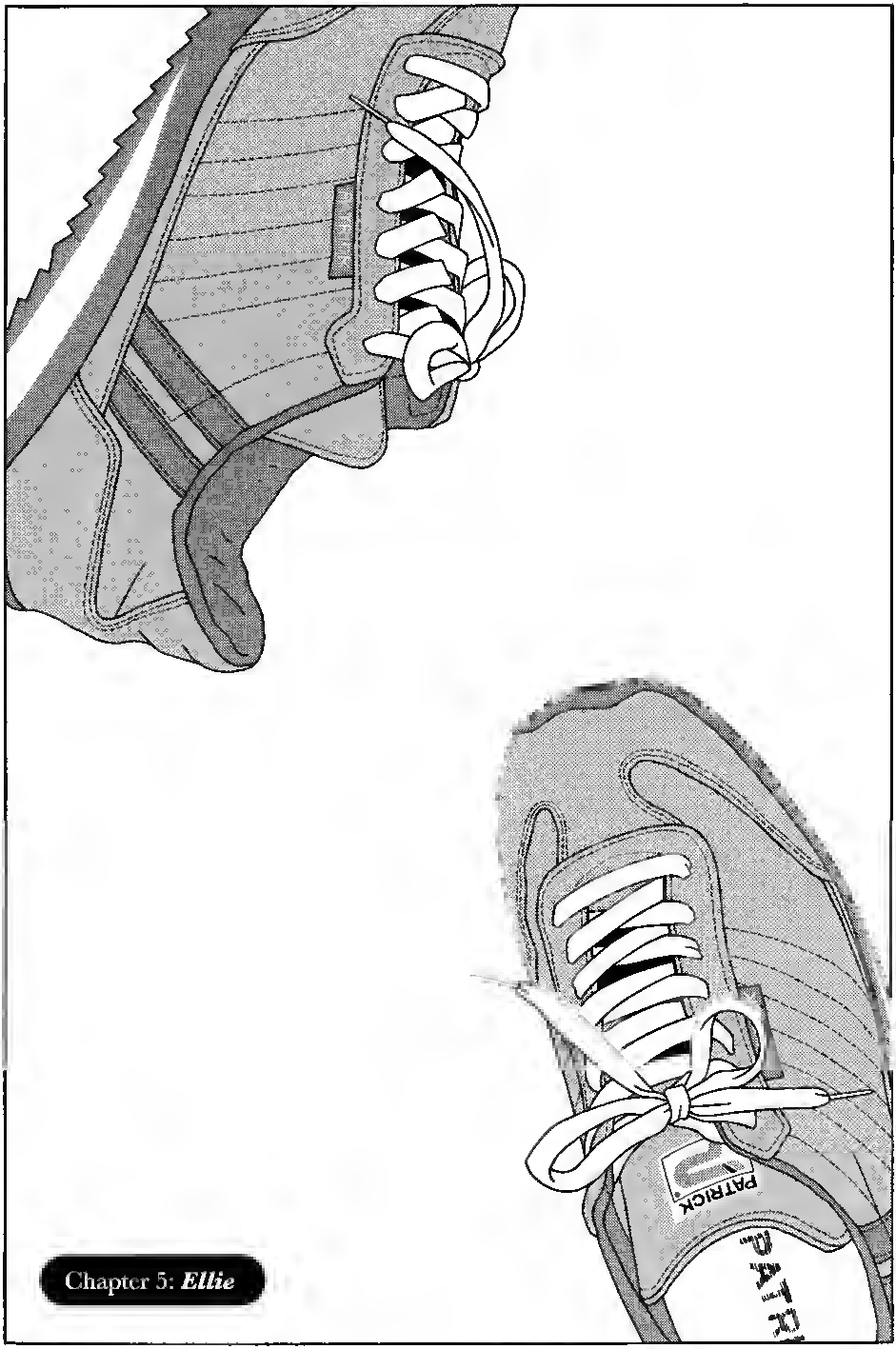
Nothing matters when we're together.





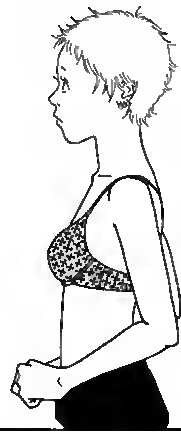

I JUST WANTED TO SAY IT OUT LOUD.
Hm hm!
SORRY, FORGET ABOUT IT.
Is every lie...
WHAT?


It's too late to worry about it now.
What about lying to protect yourself?
...a sin?
But for a while, I was afraid to face her.



Chapter 5: ***Ellie***

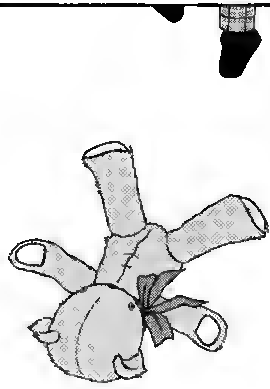
Hi, there. I'm Ichiko. Right now, I'm wondering when exactly I became a lesbian.



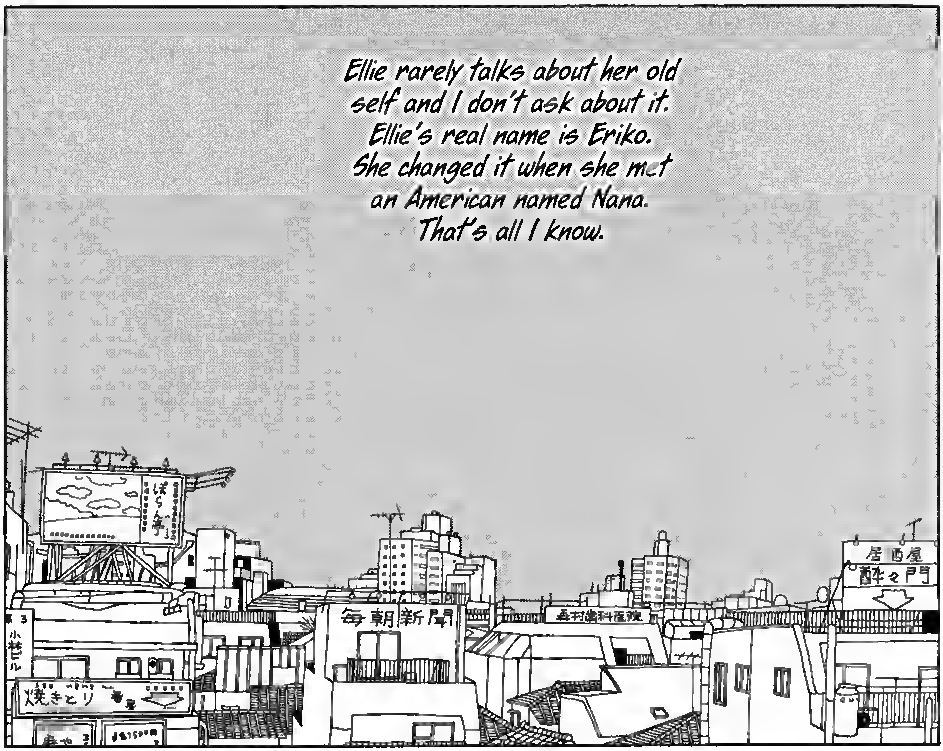
I don't ever recall liking guys other than Papa and musicians. That's right. I always dreamed of women.

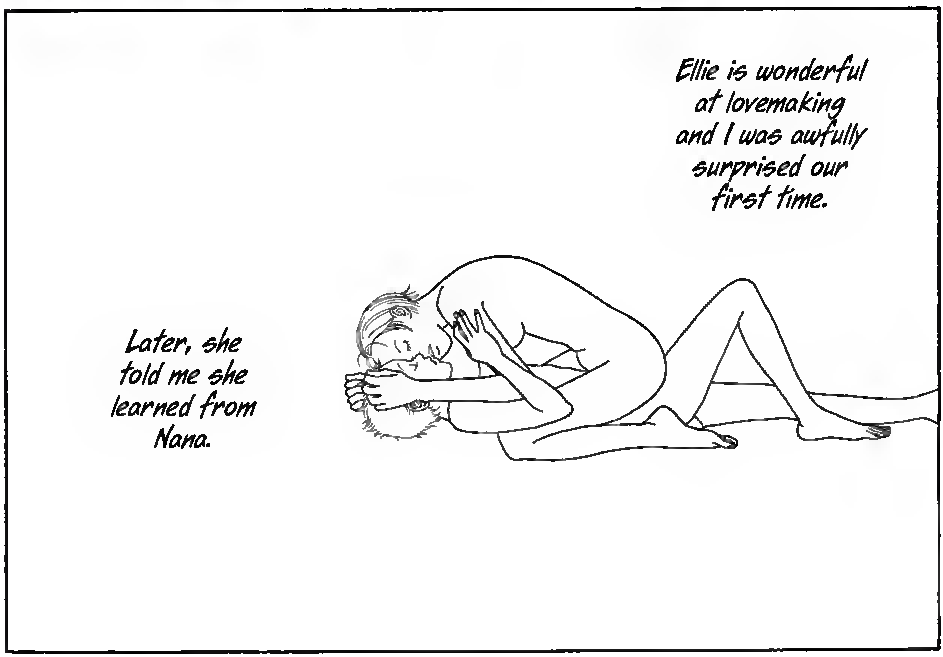
But I'd been denying that it was love. I convinced myself that I missed Mama because she died when I was eleven.

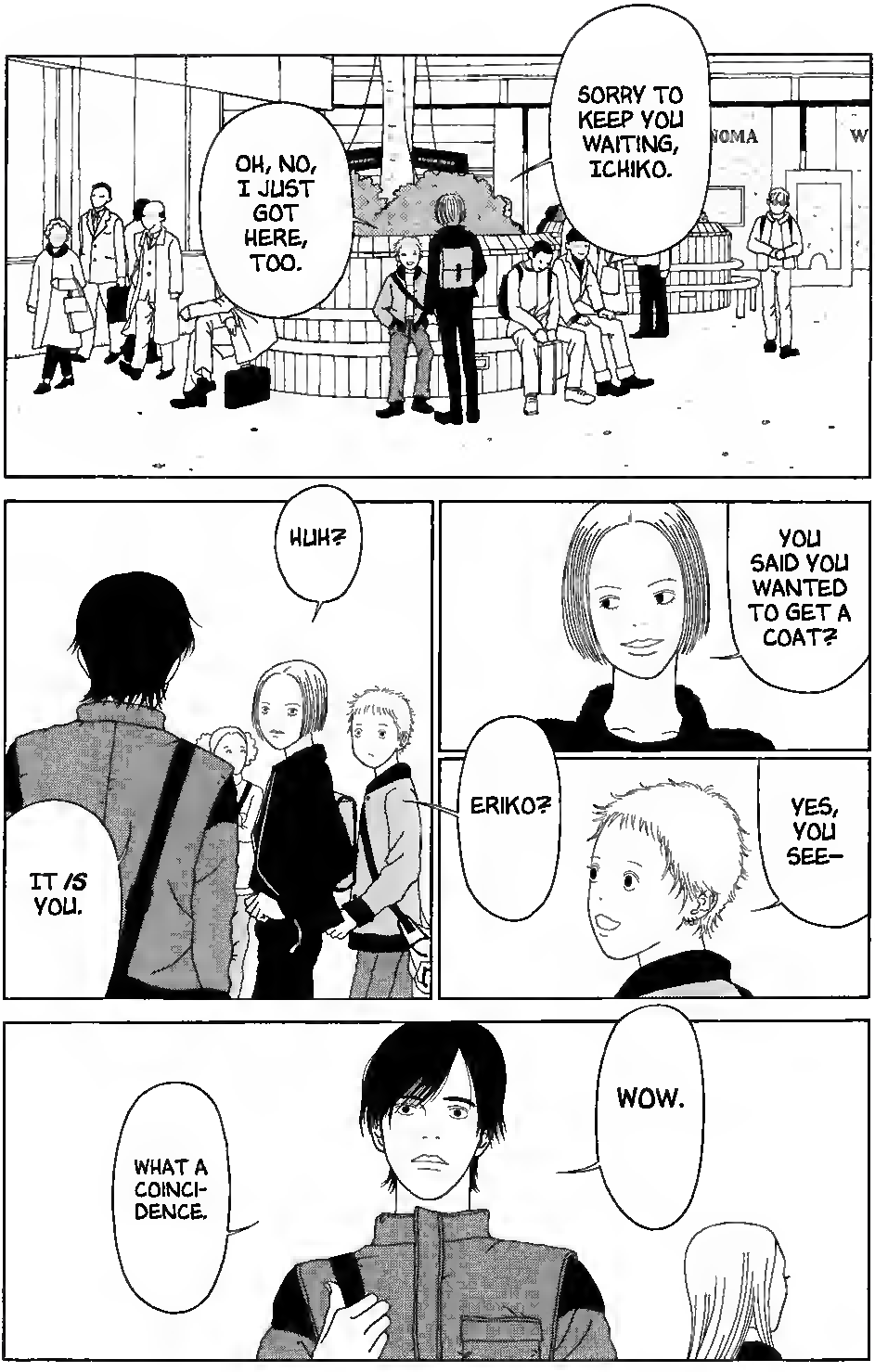
And that I was attracted to women because I wasn't an adult yet. Maybe I'd grow out of it.

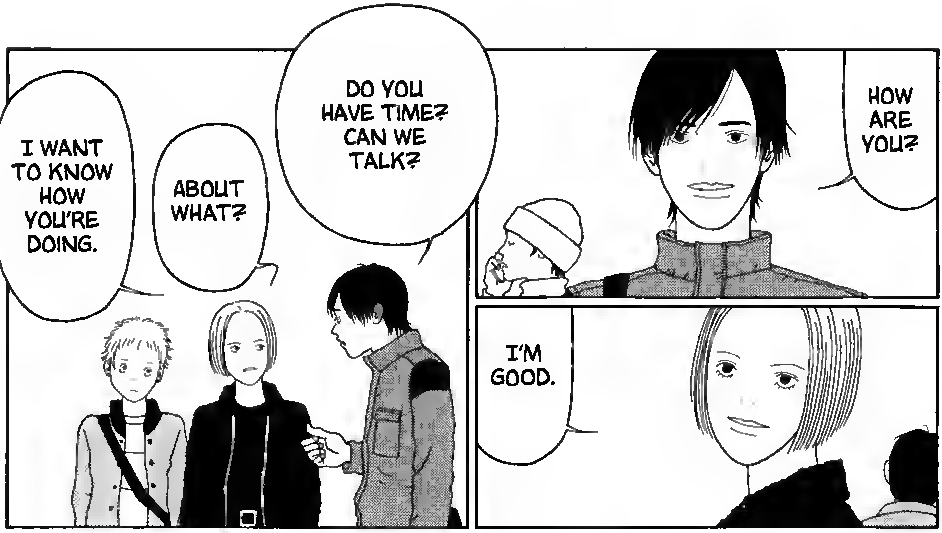


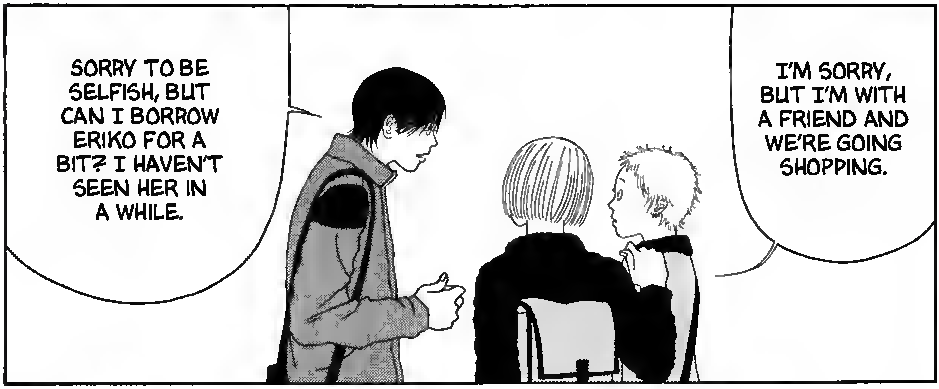
That idea went out the window when I met Ellie. I realized what I sought from her was a romantic relationship and a sex partner. She's different from Mama. She doesn't replace Mama.

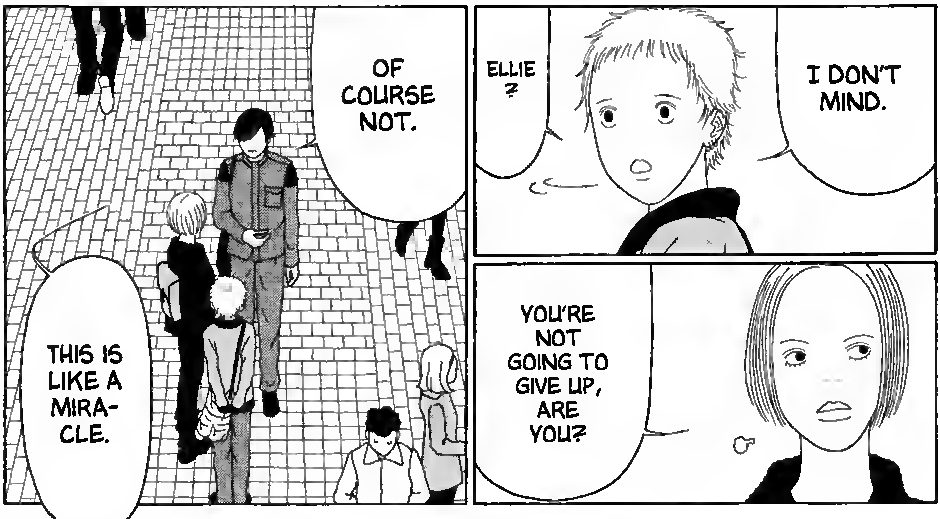

Ellie rarely talks about her old self and I don't ask about it.
Ellie's real name is Eriko.
She changed it when she met an American named Nana.
That's all I know.
朝新聞
焼きとり
居酒屋
酔々門

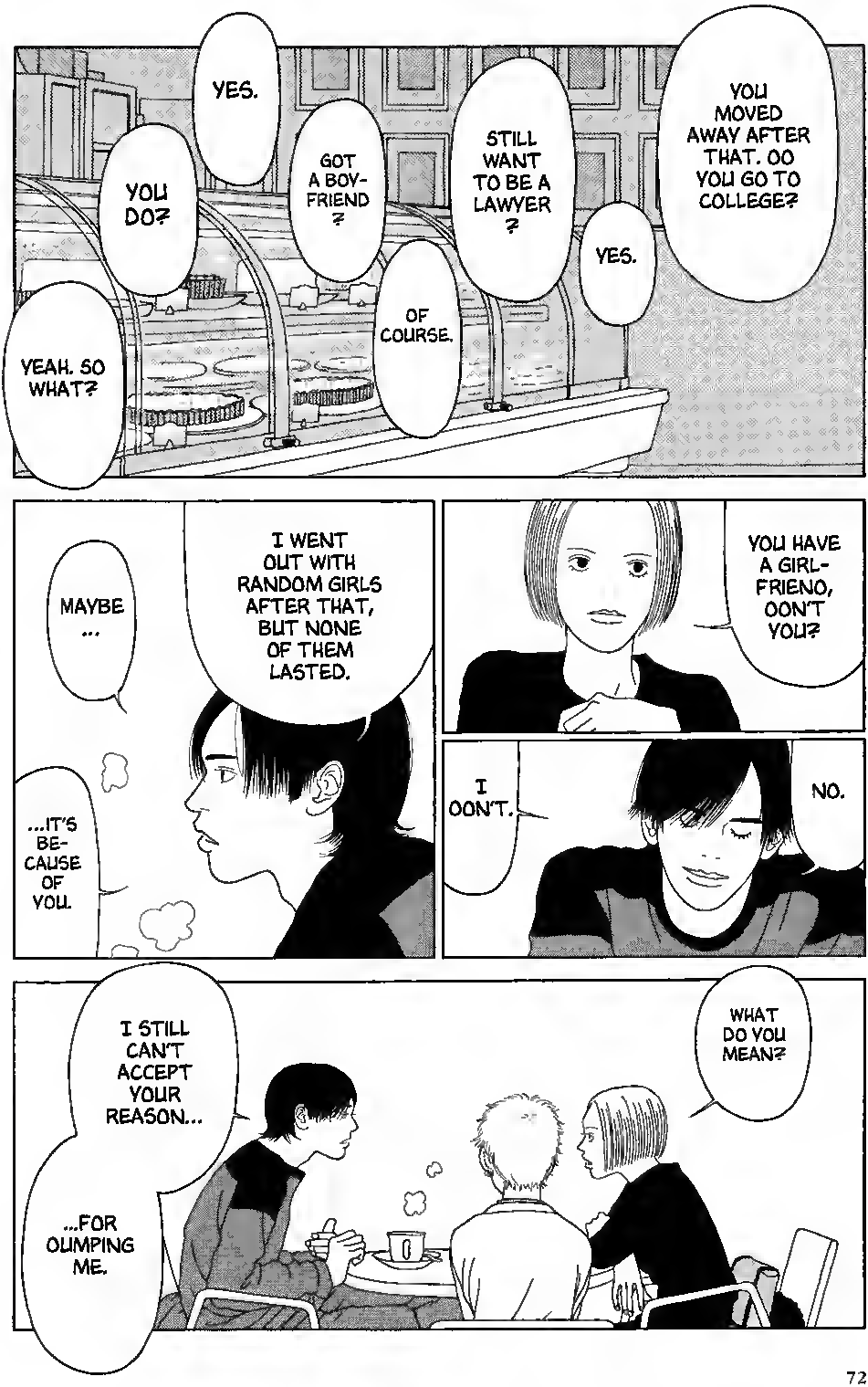

Ellie is wonderful at lovemaking and I was awfully surprised our first time.
Later, she told me she learned from Nana.

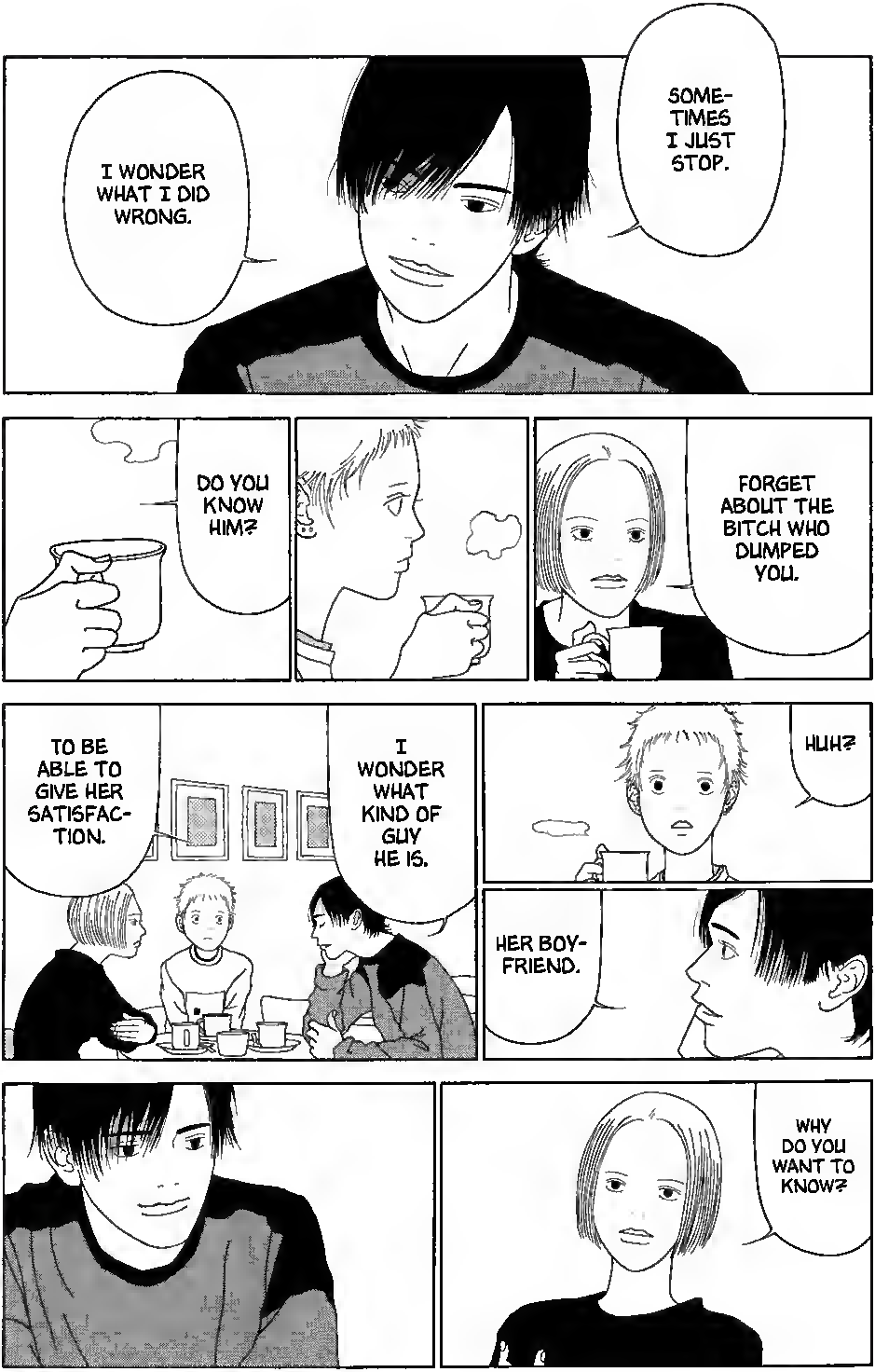

SORRY TO KEEP YOU WAITING, ICHIKO.
OH, NO, I JUST GOT HERE, TOO.
HUH?
IT IS YOU.
YOU SAID YOU WANTED TO GET A COAT?
ERIKO?
YES, YOU SEE—
WOW.
WHAT A COINCI-DENCE.

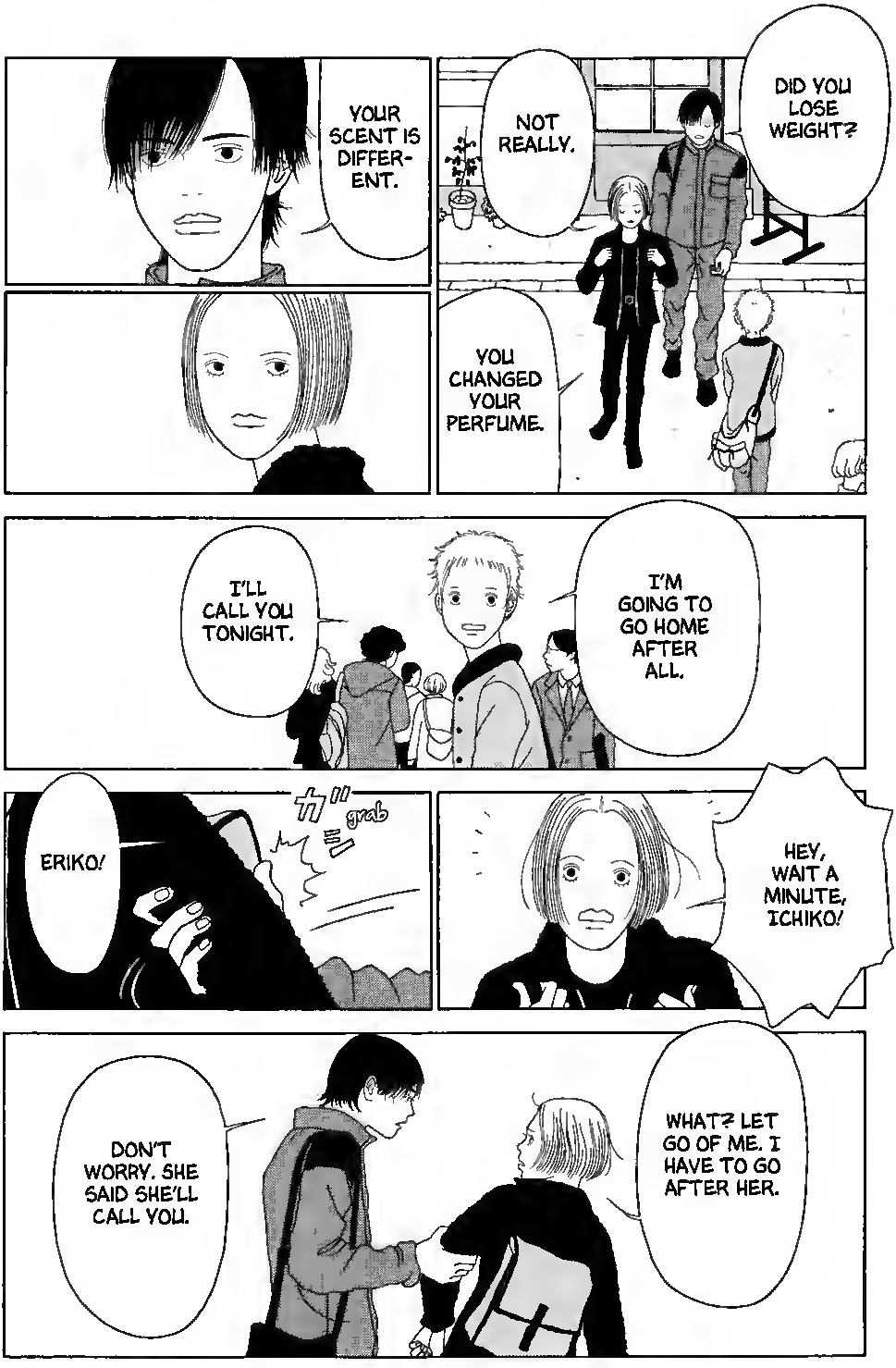

I WANT TO KNOW HOW YOU'RE DOING.
ABOUT WHAT?
DO YOU HAVE TIME? CAN WE TALK?
HOW ARE YOU?
I'M GOOD.


SORRY TO BE SELFISH, BUT CAN I BORROW ERIKO FOR A BIT? I HAVEN'T SEEN HER IN A WHILE.
I'M SORRY, BUT I'M WITH A FRIEND AND WE'RE GOING SHOPPING.

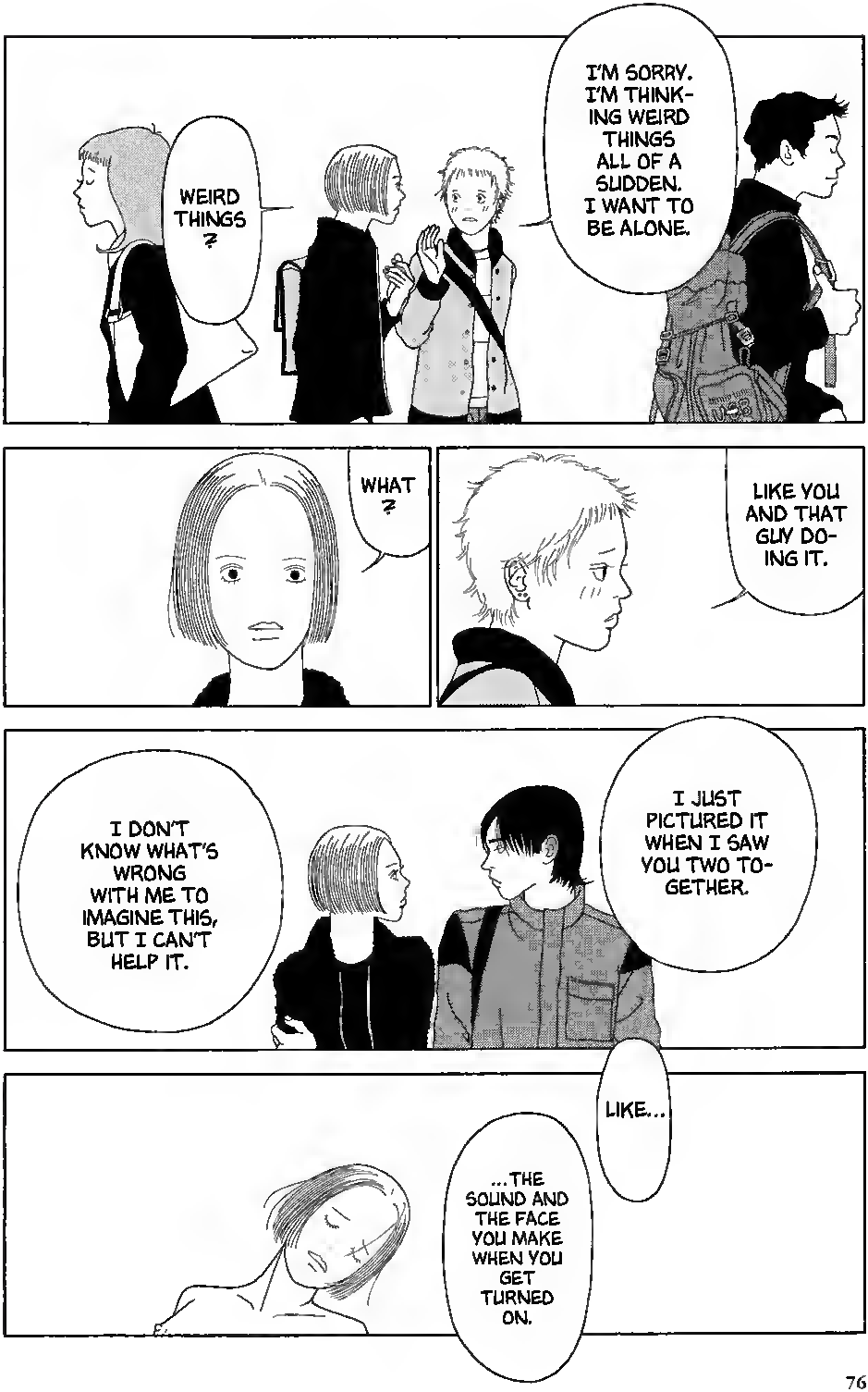

OF COURSE NOT.
THIS IS LIKE A MIRA-CLE.
ELLIE ?
I DON'T MIND.
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO GIVE UP, ARE YOU?

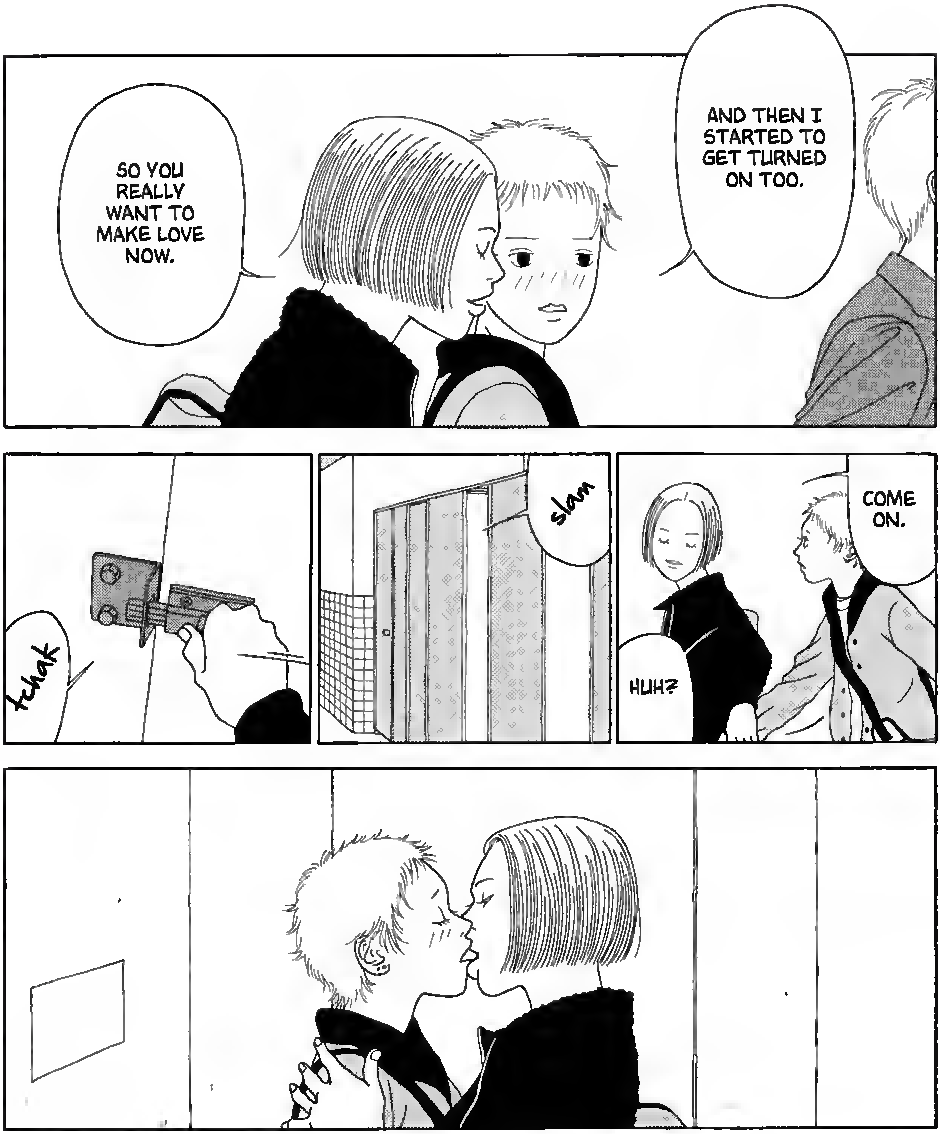

YOU MOVED AWAY AFTER THAT. DO YOU GO TO COLLEGE?
YES.
STILL WANT TO BE A LAWYER?
OF COURSE.
GOT A BOYFRIEND?
YES.
YOU DO?
YEAH. SO WHAT?
YOU HAVE A GIRLFRIEND, DON'T YOU?
NO.
I DON'T.
I WENT OUT WITH RANDOM GIRLS AFTER THAT, BUT NONE OF THEM LASTED.
MAYBE...
...IT'S BECAUSE OF YOU.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
I STILL CAN'T ACCEPT YOUR REASON...
...FOR DUMPING ME.


I WONDER WHAT I DID WRONG.
SOME-TIMES I JUST STOP.
DO YOU KNOW HIM?
FORGET ABOUT THE BITCH WHO DUMPED YOU.
TO BE ABLE TO GIVE HER SATISFAC-TION.
I WONDER WHAT KIND OF GUY HE IS.
HUH?
HER BOY-FRIEND.
WHY DO YOU WANT TO KNOW?


YOUR SCENT IS DIFFER-ENT.
NOT REALLY.
DID YOU LOSE WEIGHT?
YOU CHANGED YOUR PERFUME.
I'LL CALL YOU TONIGHT.
I'M GOING TO GO HOME AFTER ALL.
ERIKO!
カミ grab
HEY, WAIT A MINUTE, ICHIKO!
DON'T WORRY. SHE SAID SHE'LL CALL YOU.
WHAT? LET GO OF ME. I HAVE TO GO AFTER HER.

AS MUCH AS YOU WANT TO BELIEVE IT, THIS IS NOT A MIRACLE.
THINGS LIKE THIS HAPPEN.
ICHIKO!
SORRY TO MAKE YOU PUT UP WITH THIS CRAP.
WHERE'S THE STORE?
THE ONE WITH THE COAT THAT YOU WANT?

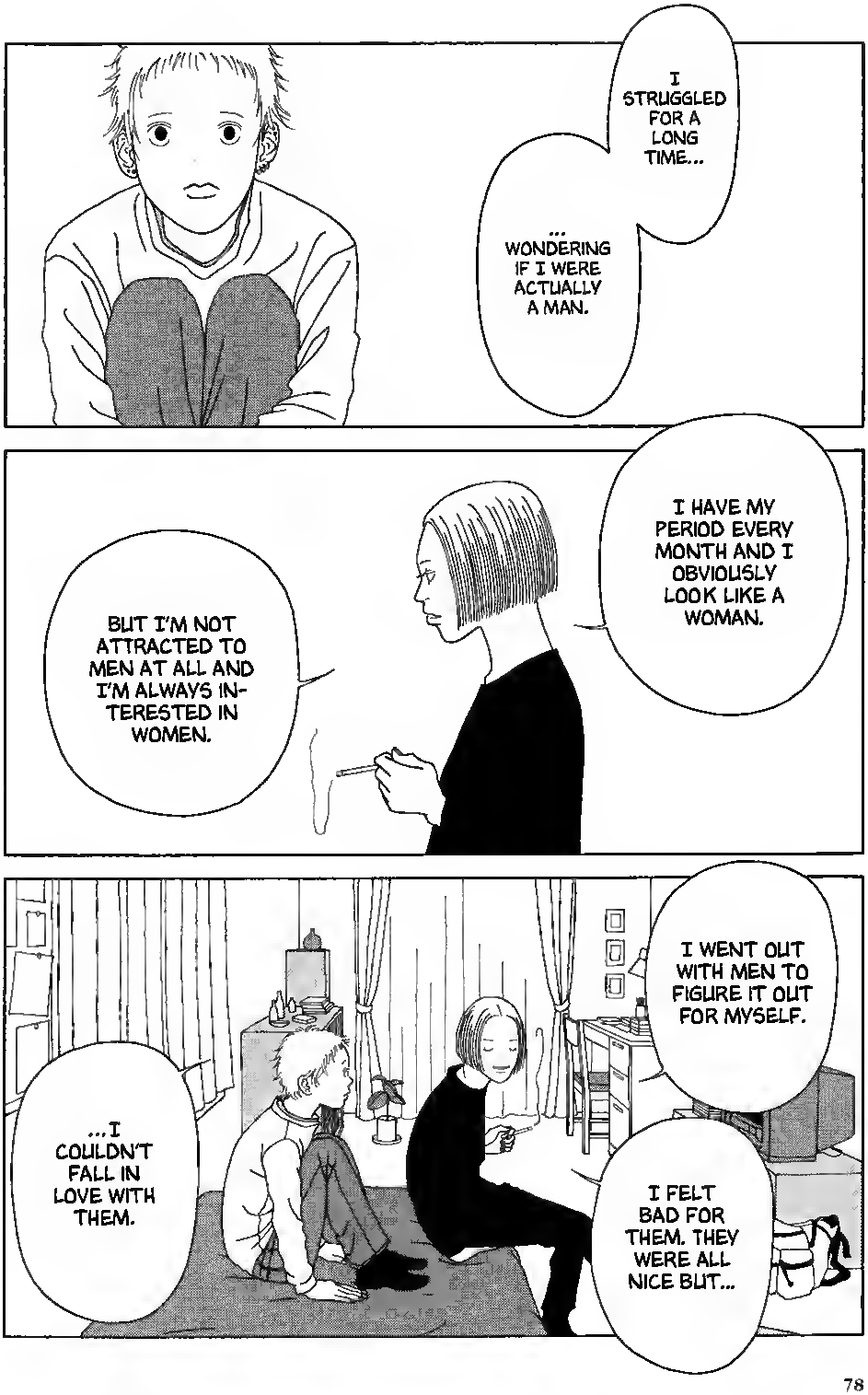

I'M SORRY. I'M THINK-ING WEIRD THINGS ALL OF A SUDDEN. I WANT TO BE ALONE.
WEIRD THINGS?
WHAT?
LIKE YOU AND THAT GUY DO-ING IT.
I JUST PICTURED IT WHEN I SAW YOU TWO TO-GETHER.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME TO IMAGINE THIS, BUT I CAN'T HELP IT.
LIKE...
...THE SOUND AND THE FACE YOU MAKE WHEN YOU GET TURNED ON.

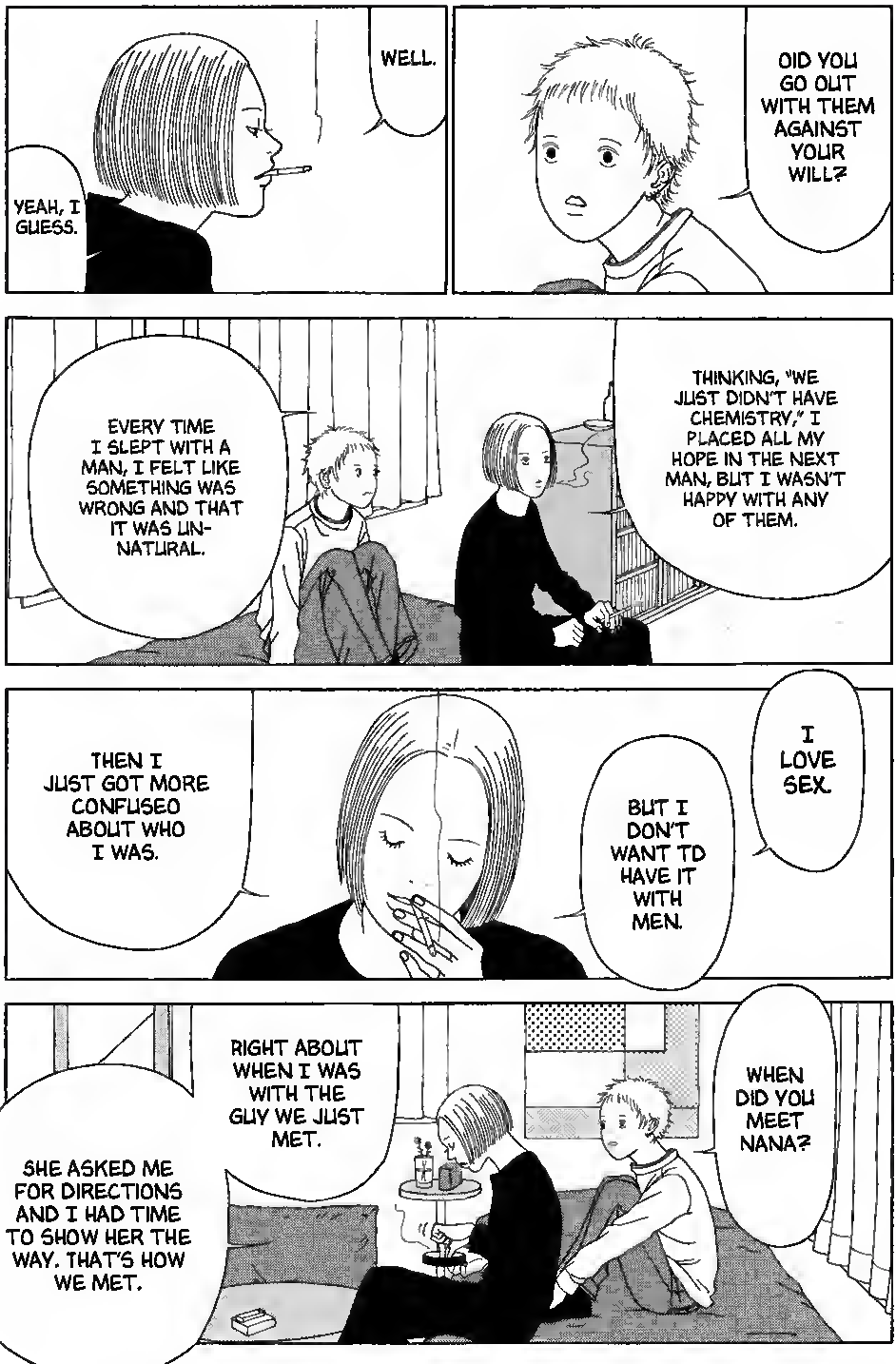


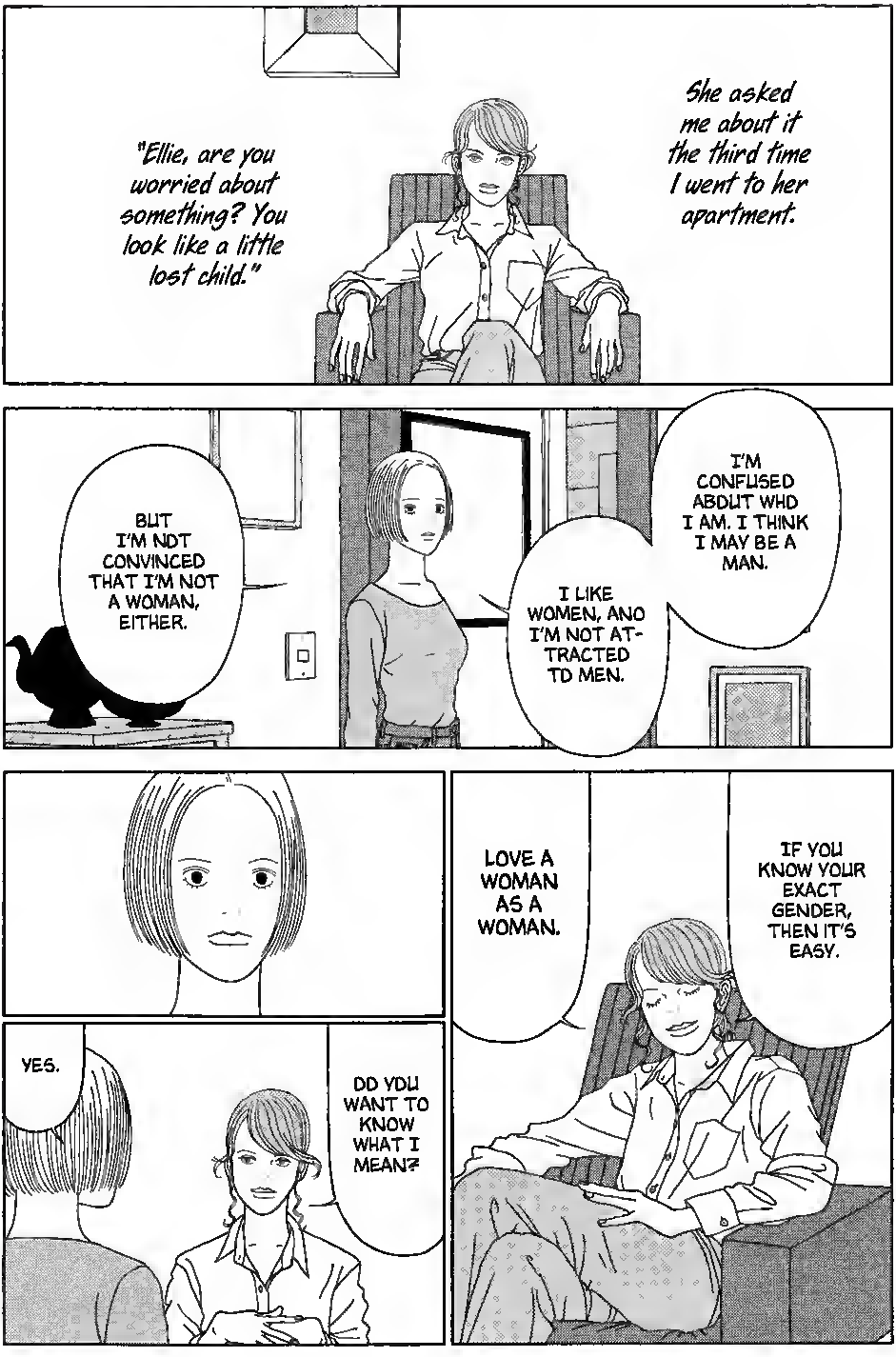
That coat I wanted may end up getting sold out.

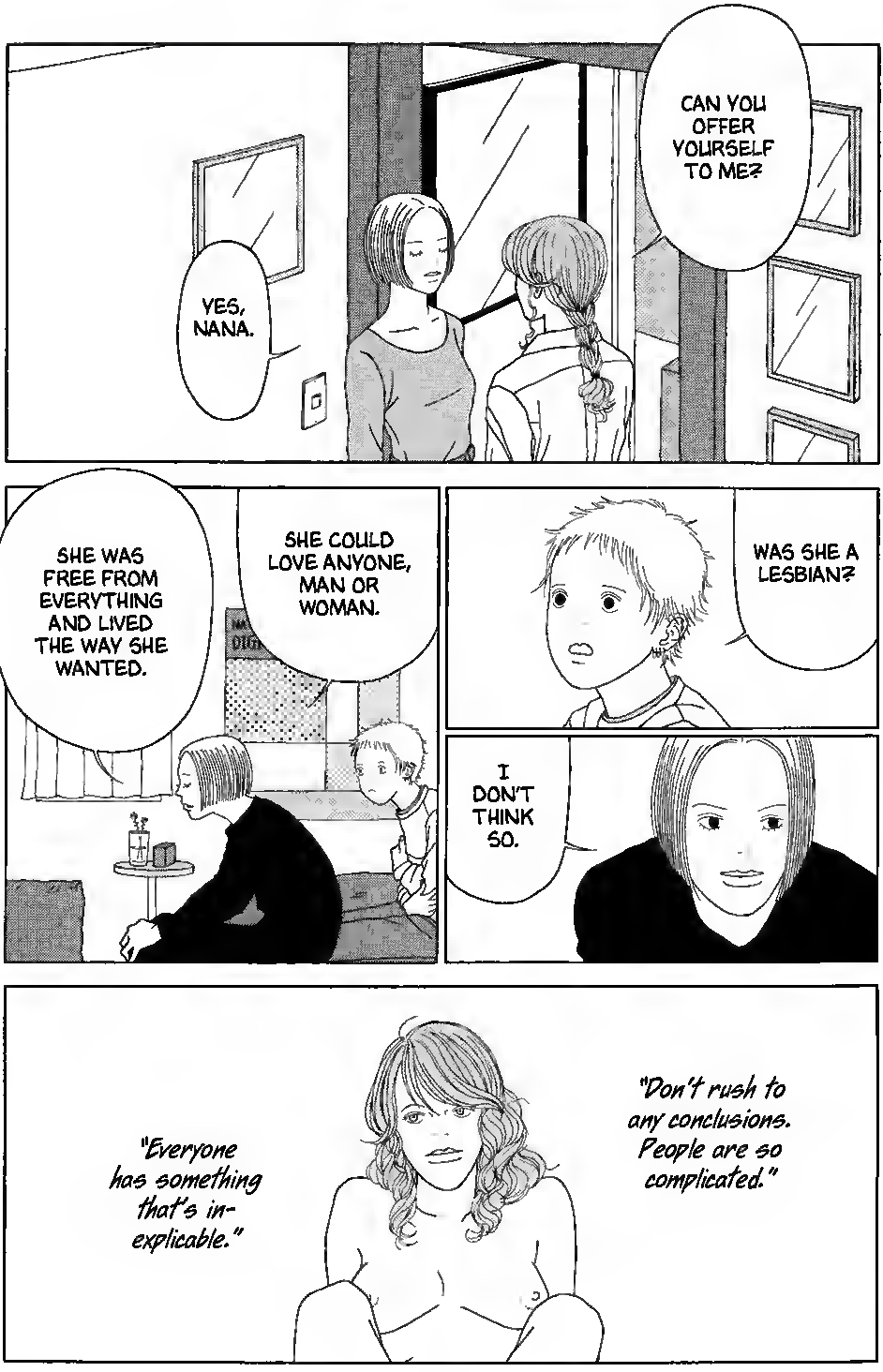
Then we went straight to her room.

I came really quickly standing there.


I STRUGGLED FOR A LONG TIME...
...WONDERING IF I WERE ACTUALLY A MAN.
I HAVE MY PERIOD EVERY MONTH AND I OBVIOUSLY LOOK LIKE A WOMAN.
BUT I'M NOT ATTRACTED TO MEN AT ALL AND I'M ALWAYS INTERESTED IN WOMEN.
I WENT OUT WITH MEN TO FIGURE IT OUT FOR MYSELF.
I FELT BAD FOR THEM. THEY WERE ALL NICE BUT...
...I COULDN'T FALL IN LOVE WITH THEM.


WELL.
YEAH, I GUESS.
DID YOU GO OUT WITH THEM AGAINST YOUR WILL?
EVERY TIME I SLEPT WITH A MAN, I FELT LIKE SOMETHING WAS WRONG AND THAT IT WAS UN-NATURAL.
THINKING, "WE JUST DIDN'T HAVE CHEMISTRY," I PLACED ALL MY HOPE IN THE NEXT MAN, BUT I WASN'T HAPPY WITH ANY OF THEM.
THEN I JUST GOT MORE CONFUSED ABOUT WHO I WAS.
BUT I DON'T WANT TO HAVE IT WITH MEN.
I LOVE SEX.
SHE ASKED ME FOR DIRECTIONS AND I HAD TIME TO SHOW HER THE WAY. THAT'S HOW WE MET.
RIGHT ABOUT WHEN I WAS WITH THE GUY WE JUST MET.
WHEN DID YOU MEET NANA?


"Ellie, are you worried about something? You look like a little lost child."
She asked me about it the third time I went to her apartment.
I'M CONFUSED ABOUT WHO I AM. I THINK I MAY BE A MAN.
I LIKE WOMEN, AND I'M NOT ATTRACTED TO MEN.
BUT I'M NOT CONVINCED THAT I'M NOT A WOMAN, EITHER.
IF YOU KNOW YOUR EXACT GENDER, THEN IT'S EASY.
LOVE A WOMAN AS A WOMAN.
DO YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT I MEAN?
YES.


CAN YOU OFFER YOURSELF TO ME?
YES, NANA.
SHE WAS FREE FROM EVERYTHING AND LIVED THE WAY SHE WANTED.
SHE COULD LOVE ANYONE, MAN OR WOMAN.
WAS SHE A LESBIAN?
I DON'T THINK SO.
"Everyone has something that's inexplicable."
"Don't rush to any conclusions. People are so complicated."

FUCK ME.

IT'S MY TURN.

ICHIKO.

YES?

But Ellie...

We don't know what will happen and we can't predict tamarraw.

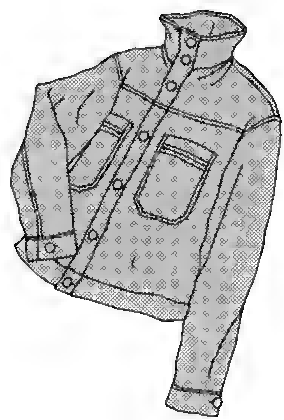
When Mama was my age, she prabably never dreamt of marrying Papa.

Three days later, the coat I wanted was gone, but I found a really coal jacket.

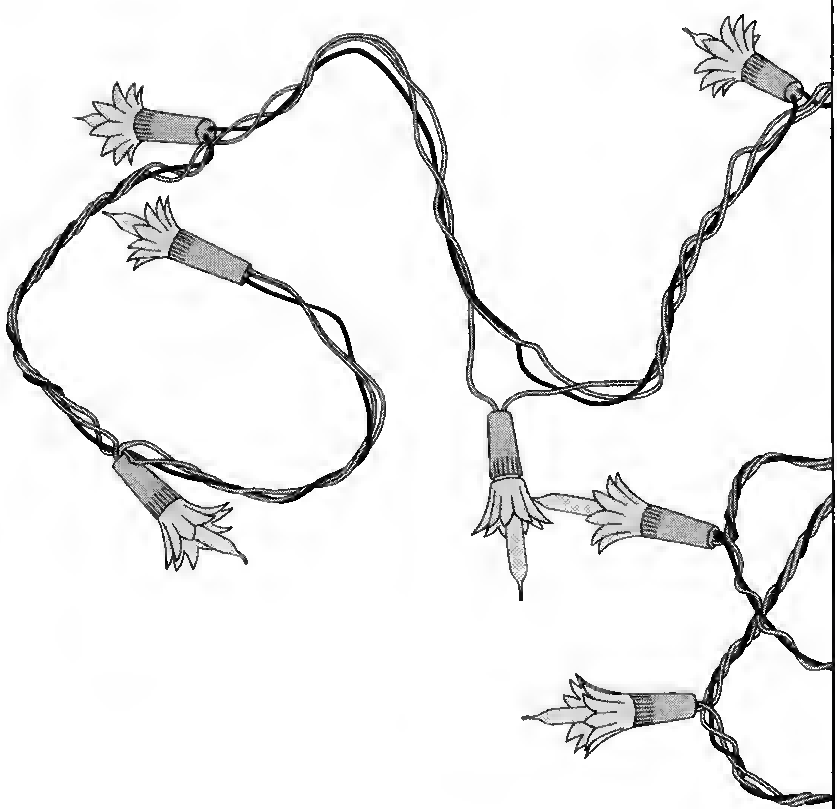
I want ta always tauch you...

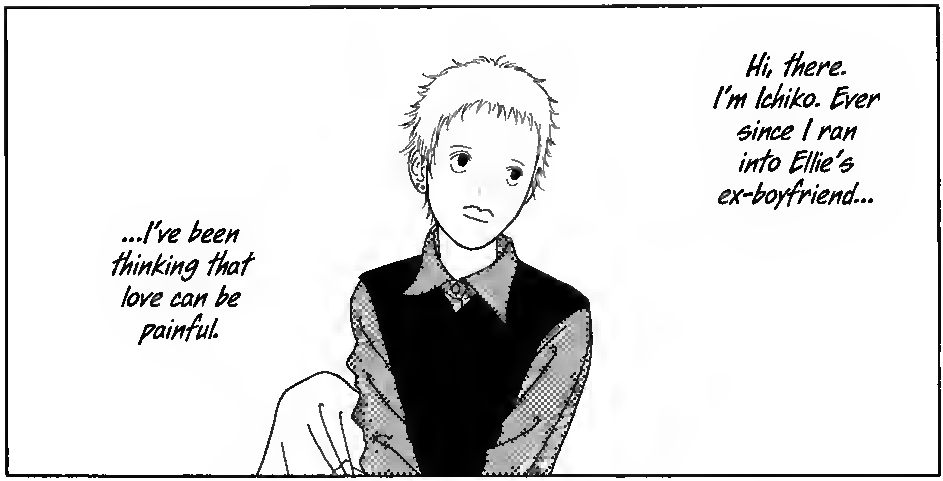
...Yaur body...

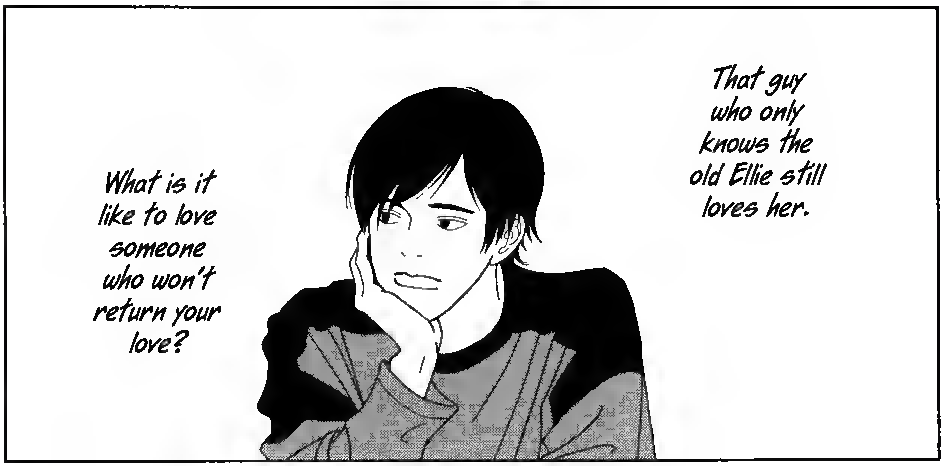
...And yaur heart.

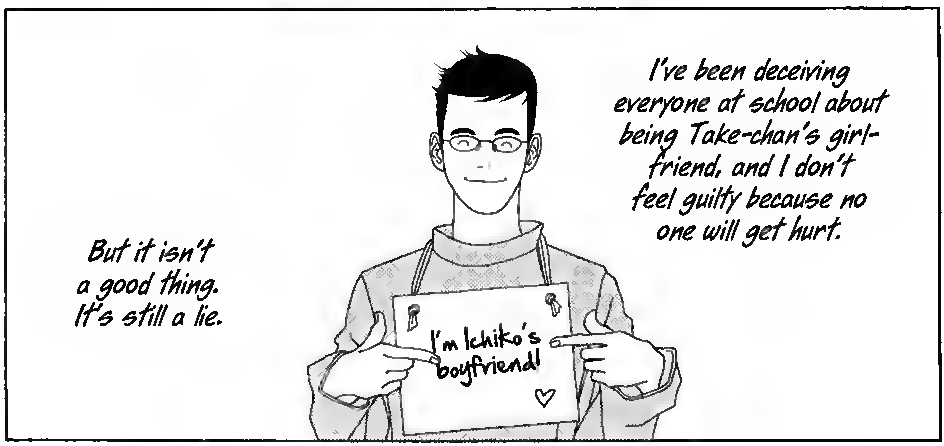


Chapter 6: *Sentimental*



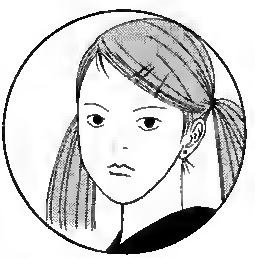

Hi, there. I'm Ichiko. Ever since I ran into Ellie's ex-boyfriend...
...I've been thinking that love can be painful.


That guy who only knows the old Ellie still loves her.
What is it like to love someone who won't return your love?

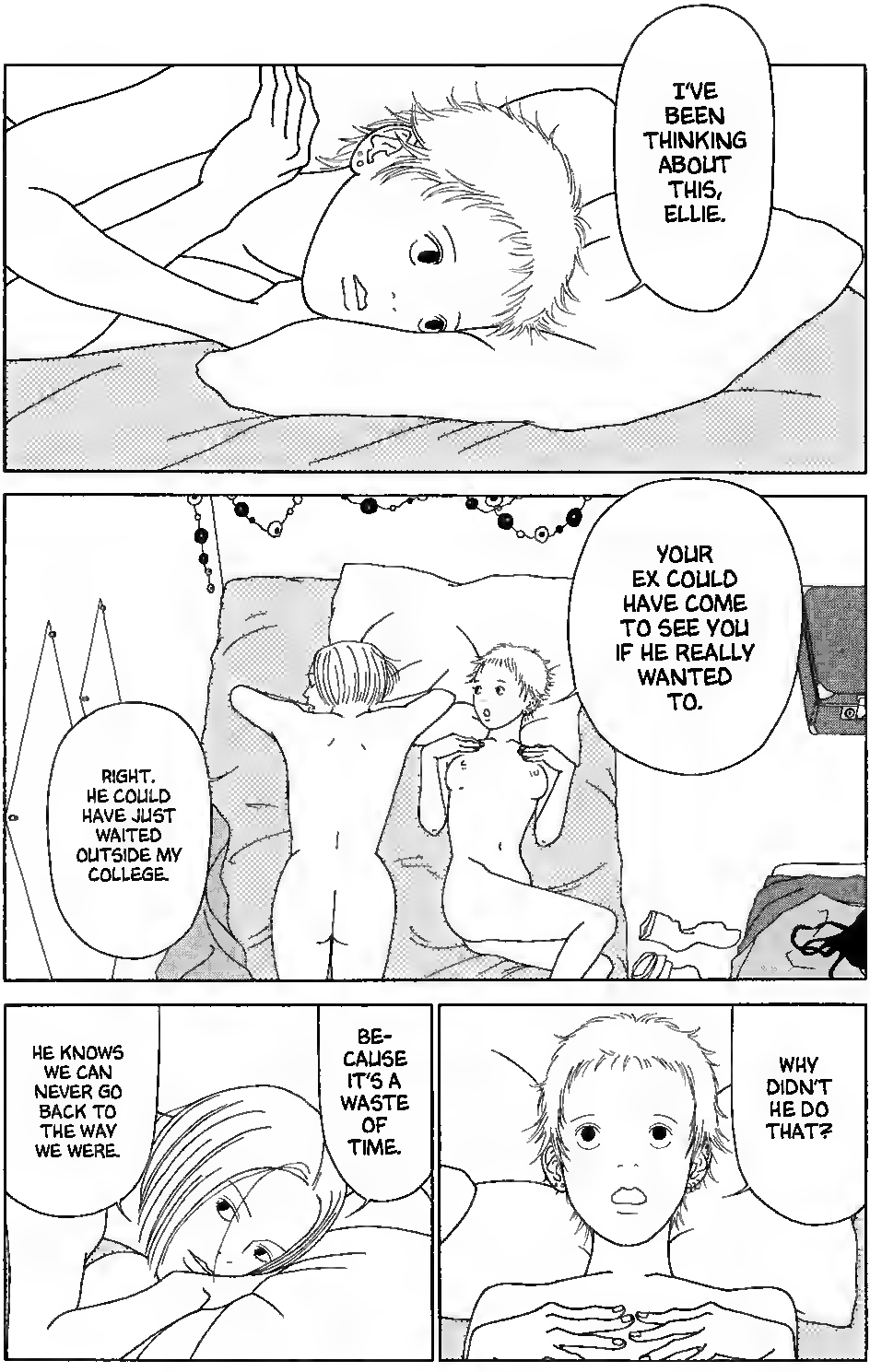

I've been deceiving everyone at school about being Take-chan's girlfriend, and I don't feel guilty because no one will get hurt.
But it isn't a good thing. It's still a lie.
I'm Ichiko's boyfriend!

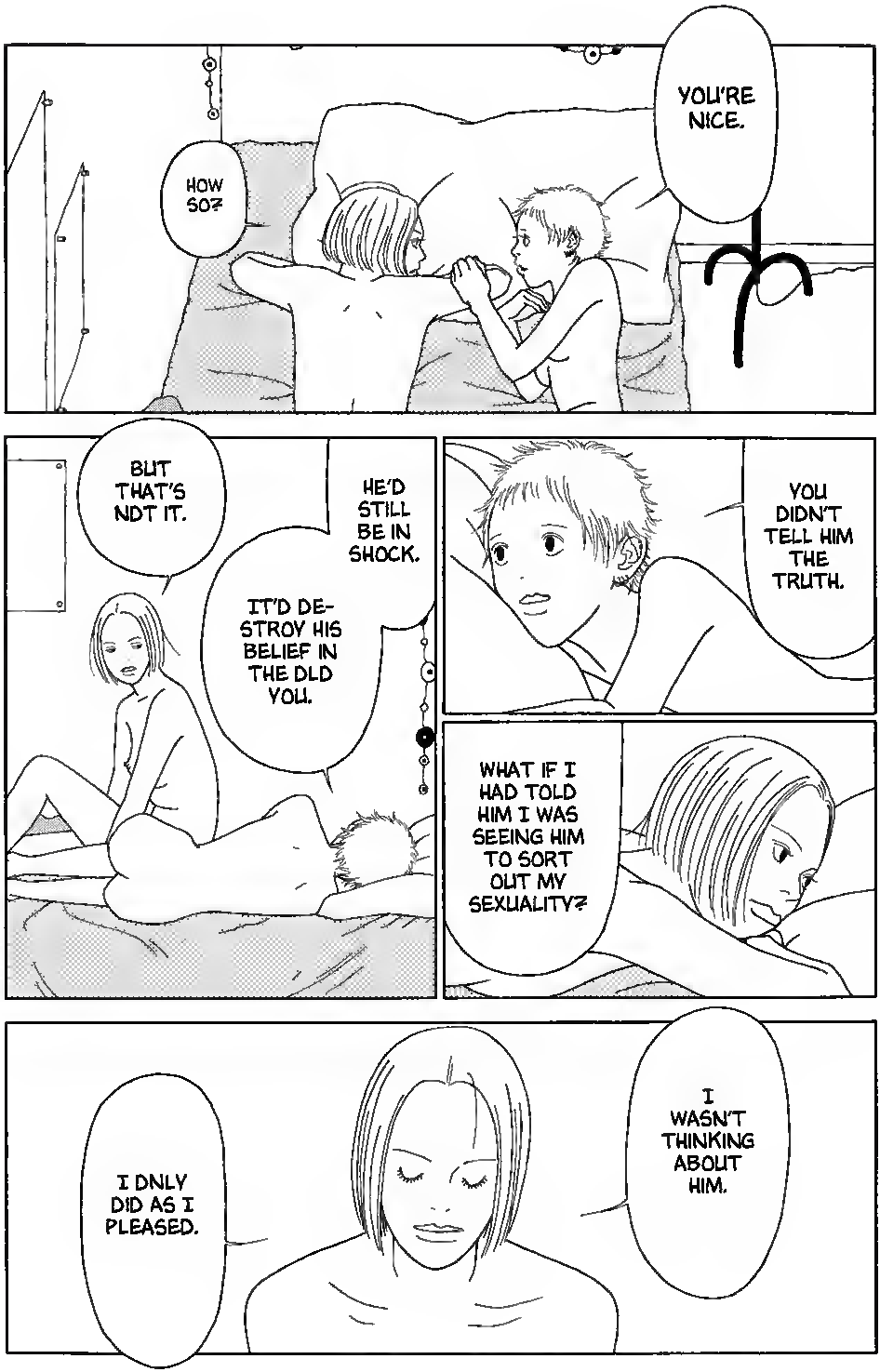
I'm still afraid of Yukako. She may resent anyone who's his girlfriend, so I'm losing out even though I'm his fake girlfriend.

I would never have lied if I had known her feelings...



...Even if her love for Take-chan, who is gay, will never be fulfilled.

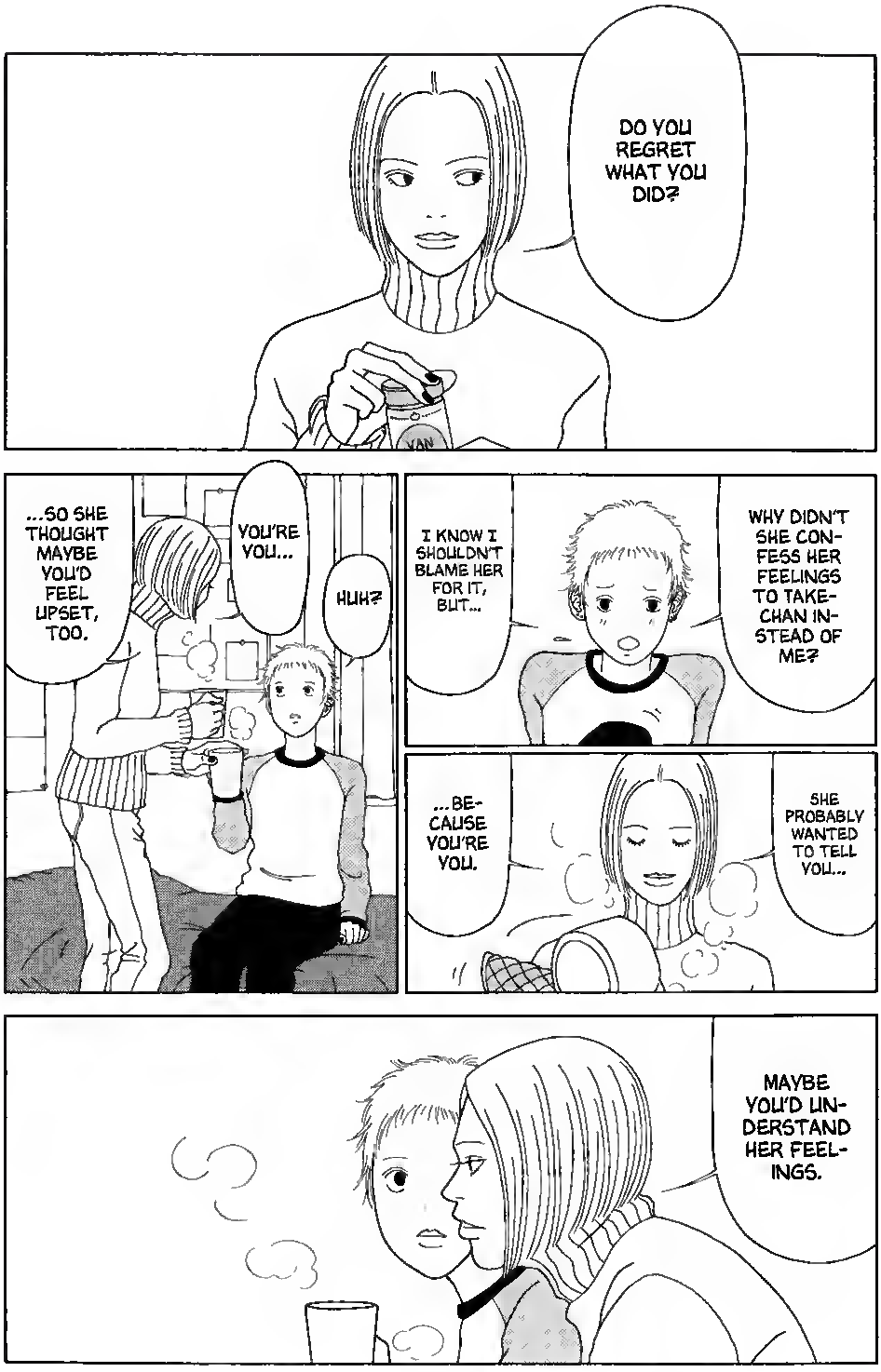

I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT THIS, ELLIE.
YOUR EX COULD HAVE COME TO SEE YOU IF HE REALLY WANTED TO.
RIGHT. HE COULD HAVE JUST WAITED OUTSIDE MY COLLEGE.
WHY DIDN'T HE DO THAT?
BE-CAUSE IT'S A WASTE OF TIME.
HE KNOWS WE CAN NEVER GO BACK TO THE WAY WE WERE.

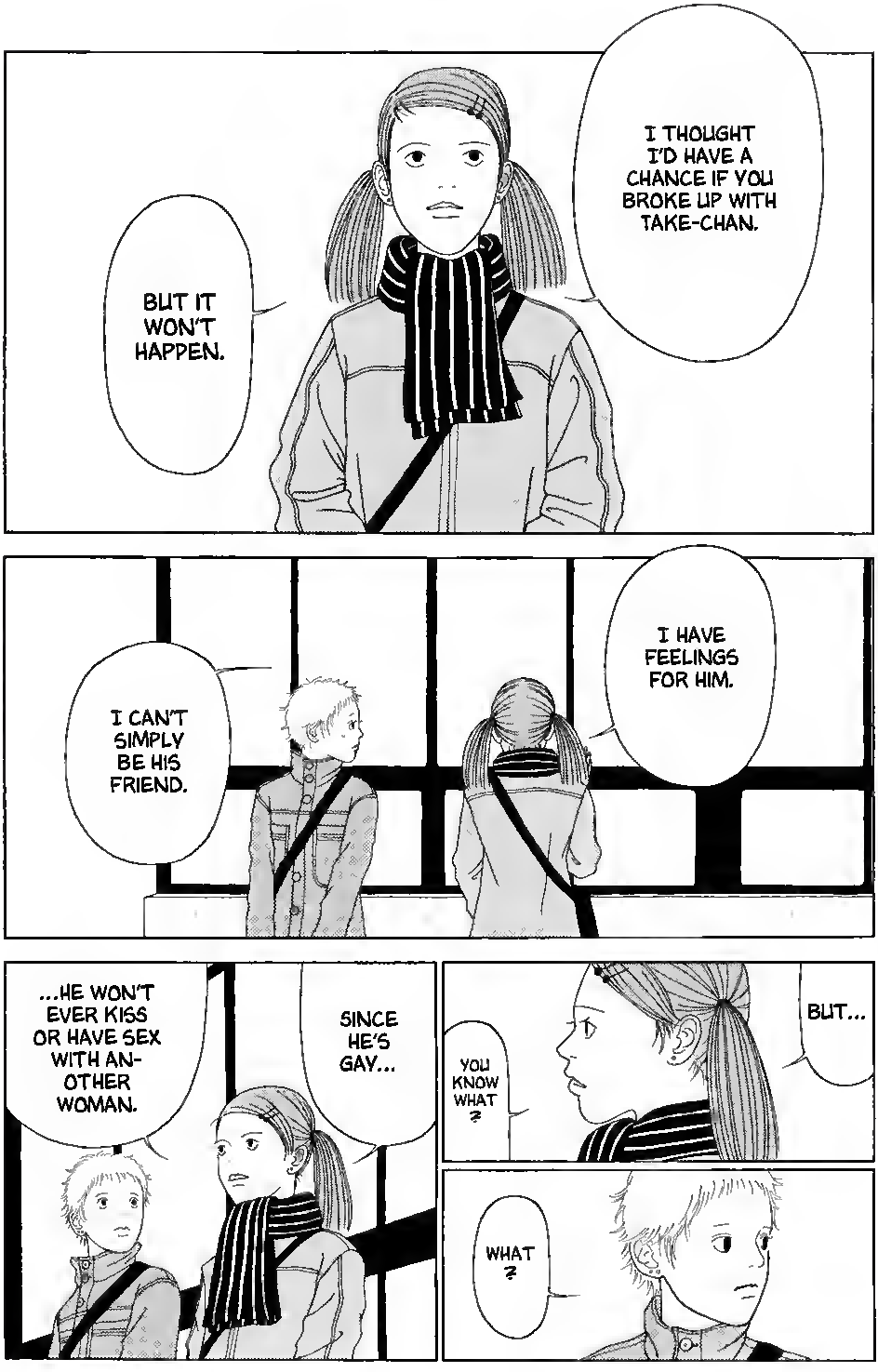

YOU'RE NICE.
HOW SO?
BUT THAT'S NOT IT.
HE'D STILL BE IN SHOCK.
IT'D DE-STROY HIS BELIEF IN THE OLD YOU.
YOU DIDN'T TELL HIM THE TRUTH.
WHAT IF I HAD TOLD HIM I WAS SEEING HIM TO SORT OUT MY SEXUALITY?
I WASN'T THINKING ABOUT HIM.
I ONLY DID AS I PLEASED.

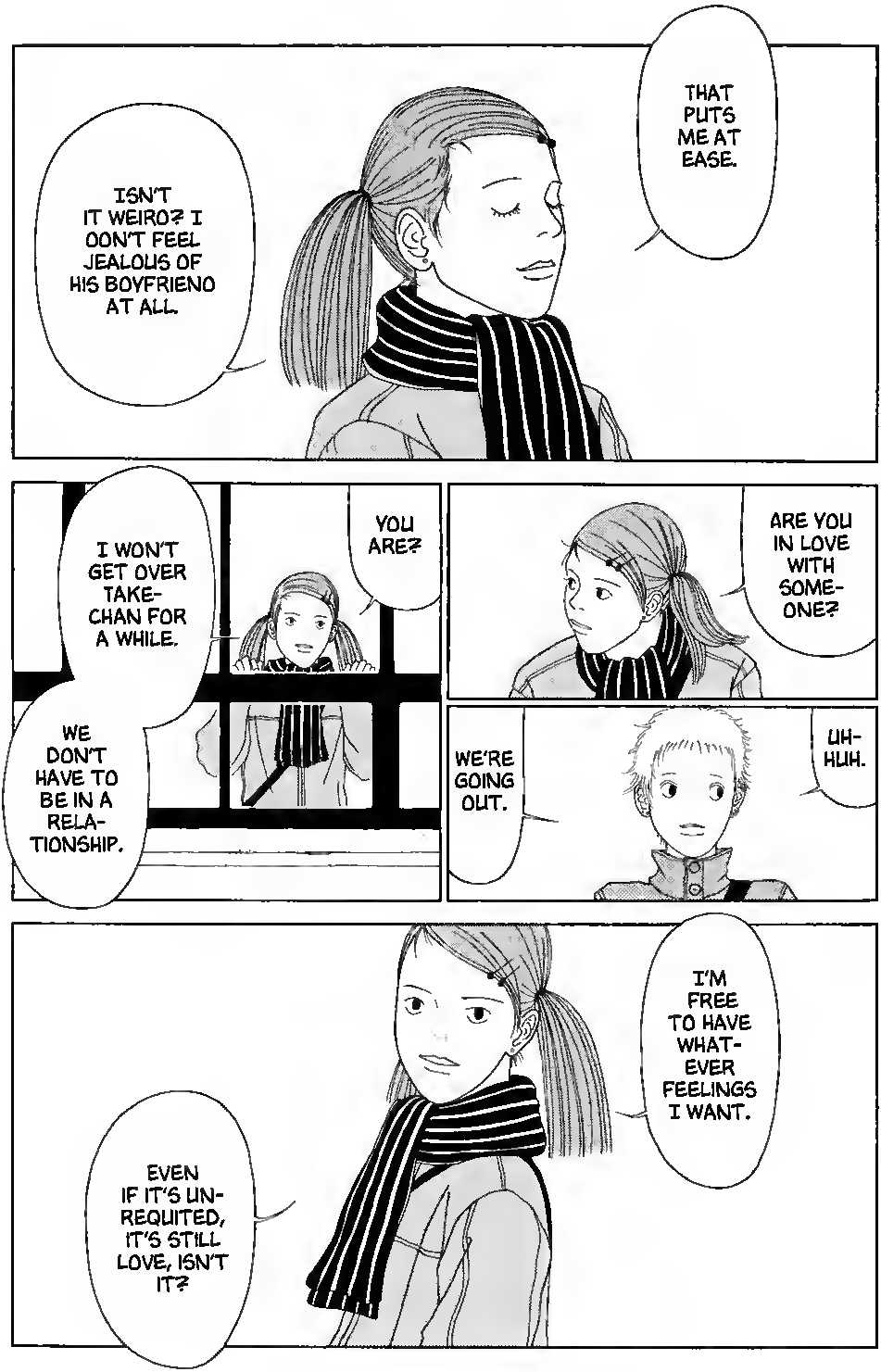
HOW COME IT'S ALWAYS ALL ABOUT SEX?! THAT JACKASS!
HUH?
UGH.
I GOT DUMPED YESTERDAY BECAUSE HE WAS BORED OF ME.
...IS WAY MORE FUN.
TAKE-CHAN...
I THINK SEX IS ESSENTIAL, TOO.
HE ALREADY FOUND SOMEONE NEW. HE SAID THE SEX WITH HIM...
BUT THAT'S NOT THE ONLY IMPORTANT THING IN A RELATIONSHIP.
I WANT TO HAVE A DEEP CONNECTION WITH SOMEONE.
I WANT TO HAVE A SERIOUS DISCUSSION ABOUT WHAT MATTERS IN LIFE WITH MY PARTNER.

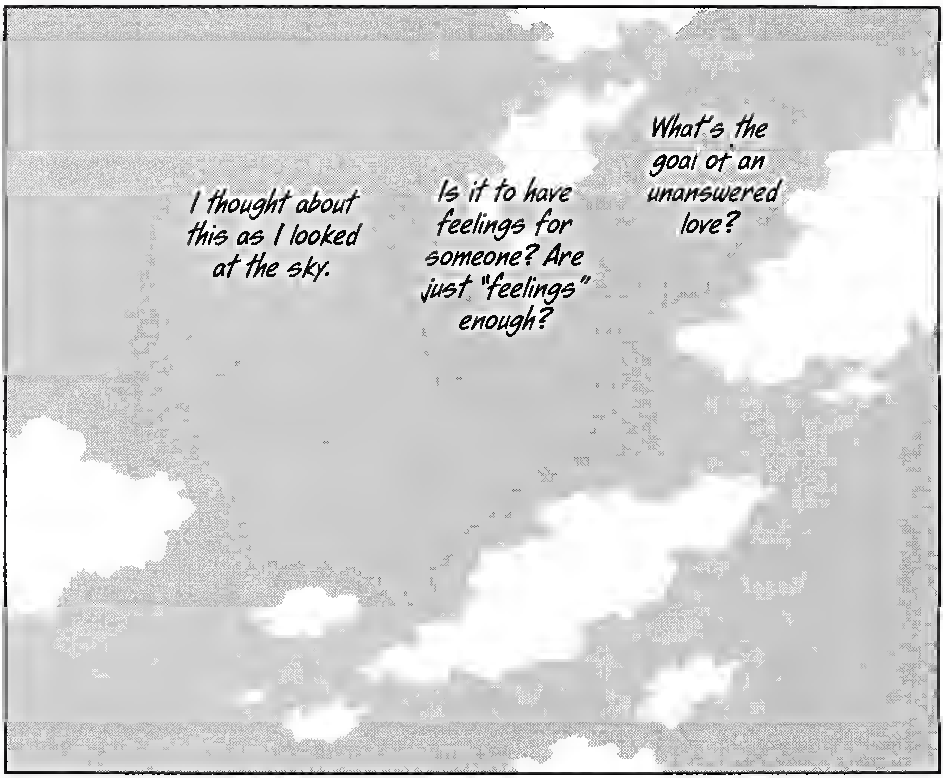
A SERIOUS DISCUSSION? I DON'T KNOW IF WE DO.
HMM.
I'M JEALOUS OF YOUR LAWYER-WANNABE GIRL-FRIEND.
'MORNING, TAKE-CHAN!
YU-KAKO.
HEY, YUKAKO! 'MORN-ING!
WELL ...
DOES IT INCLUDE WHAT WE LIKE ABOUT SEX?
WHY? YOU DON'T LIKE HER?
I'M GLAD SHE DIDN'T COME THIS WAY.
'MORN-ING.
'MORNING, ICHIKO.

IT WON'T CHANGE ANYTHING.
THAT'S SILLY. WHY DIDN'T TELL YOU ME SOONER?
WHY NOT? I'LL TELL YUKAKO THE TRUTH.
I THINK IT'S BETTER TO TELL YUKAKO.
I CAN'T TAKE THIS ANY-MORE.
SHE MAY BE IN SHOCK AGAIN, BUT RELIEVING YOUR SUFFERING COMES FIRST.
...JUST LIKE THAT?
WAIT, SHOULD YOU COME OUT OF THE CLOSET ...
TAKE-CHAN.

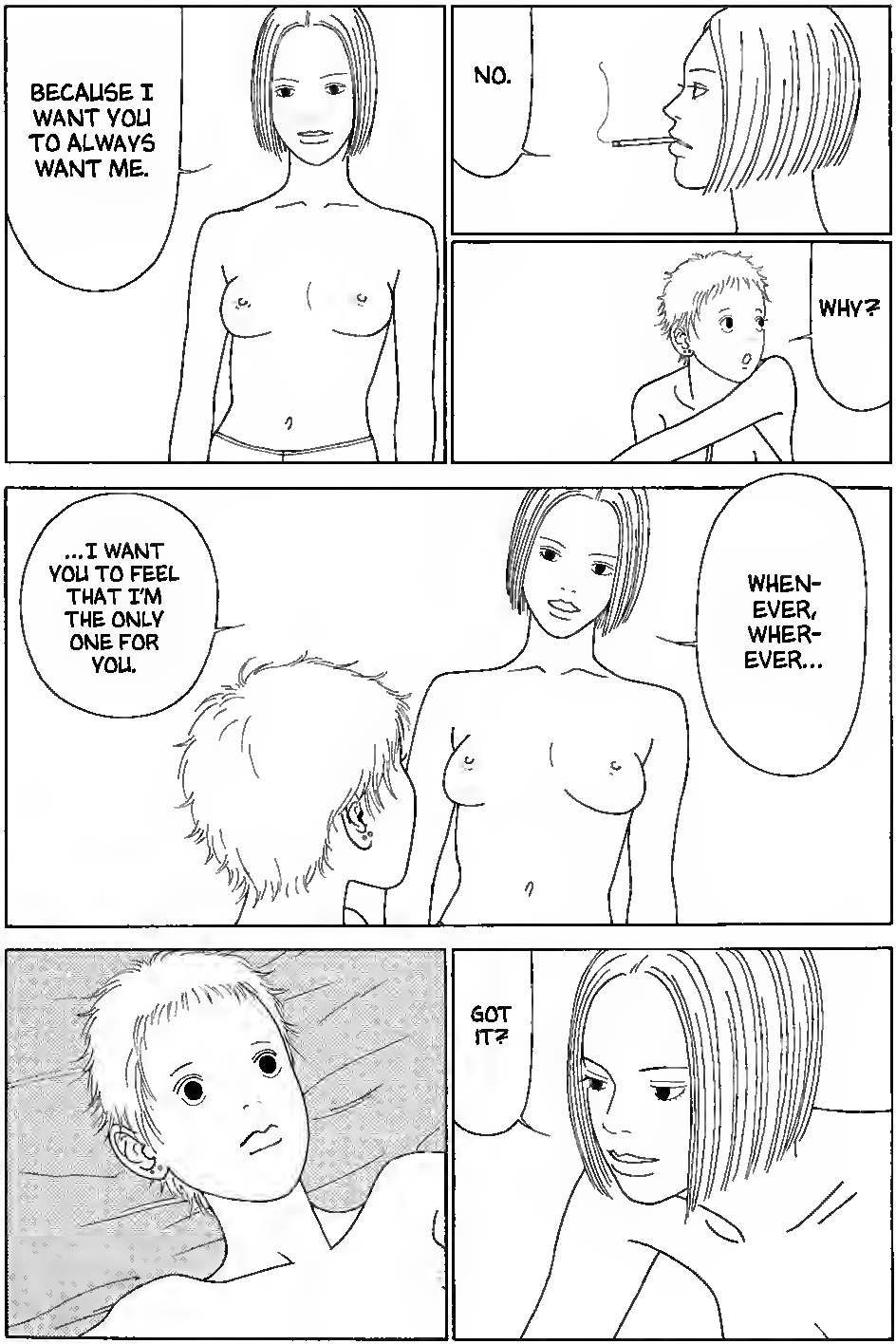

DO YOU REGRET WHAT YOU DID?
YAN
...SO SHE THOUGHT MAYBE YOU'D FEEL UPSET, TOO.
YOU'RE YOU...
HUH?
I KNOW I SHOULDN'T BLAME HER FOR IT, BUT...
WHY DIDN'T SHE CONFESS HER FEELINGS TO TAKECHAN INSTEAD OF ME?
...BECAUSE YOU'RE YOU.
SHE PROBABLY WANTED TO TELL YOU...
MAYBE YOU'D UNDERSTAND HER FEELINGS.

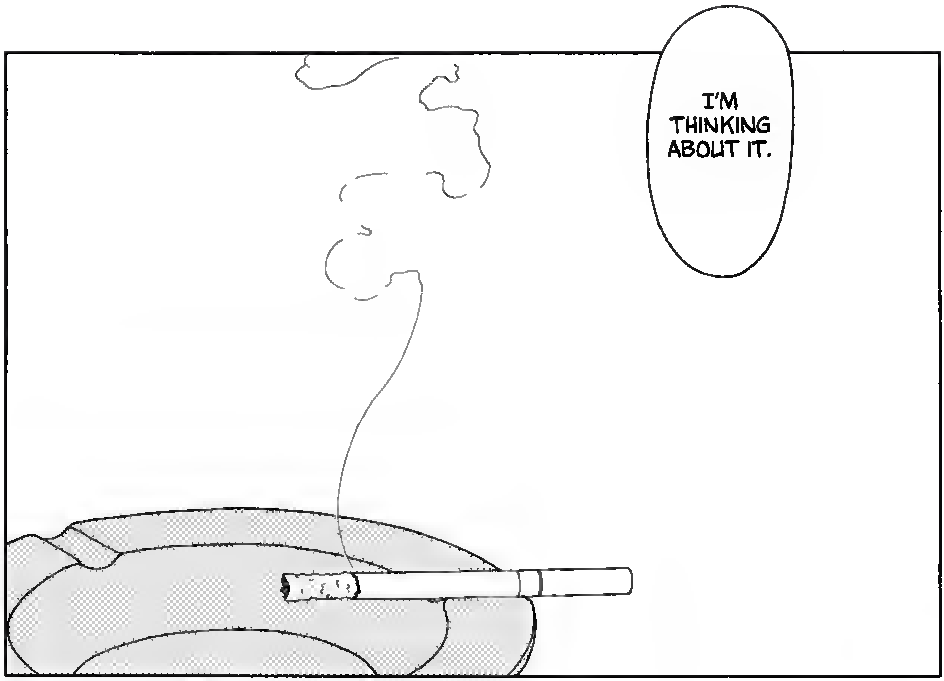

I THOUGHT I'D HAVE A CHANCE IF YOU BROKE UP WITH TAKE-CHAN.
BUT IT WON'T HAPPEN.
I HAVE FEELINGS FOR HIM.
I CAN'T SIMPLY BE HIS FRIEND.
SINCE HE'S GAY...
...HE WON'T EVER KISS OR HAVE SEX WITH ANOTHER WOMAN.
BUT...
YOU KNOW WHAT?
WHAT?

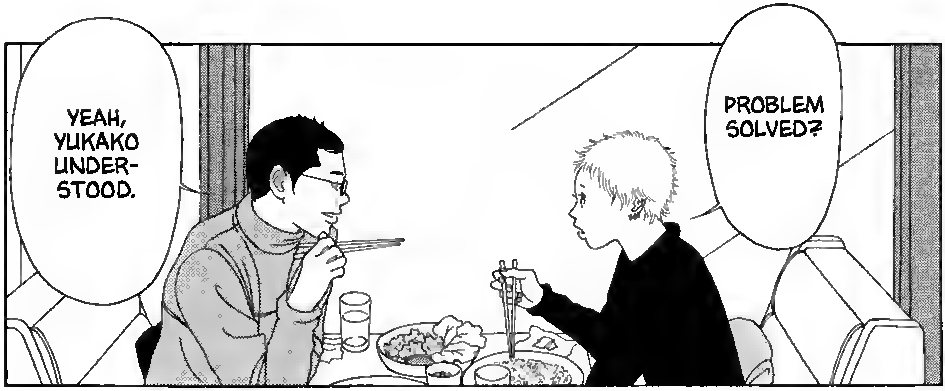

THAT PUTS ME AT EASE.
ISN'T IT WEIRD? I DON'T FEEL JEALOUS OF HIS BOYFRIEND AT ALL.
ARE YOU IN LOVE WITH SOME-ONE?
UH-HUH.
WE'RE GOING OUT.
YOU ARE?
I WON'T GET OVER TAKE-CHAN FOR A WHILE.
WE DON'T HAVE TO BE IN A RELA-TIONSHIP.
I'M FREE TO HAVE WHAT-EVER FEELINGS I WANT.
EVEN IF IT'S UN-REQUITED, IT'S STILL LOVE, ISN'T IT?

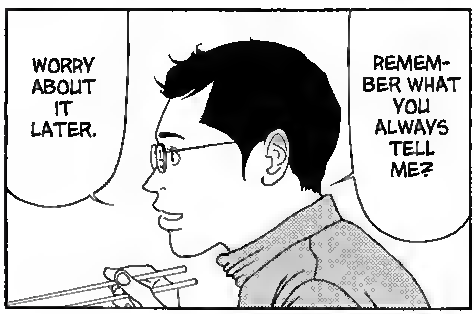

I thought about this as I looked at the sky.
Is it to have feelings for someone? Are just "feelings" enough?
What's the goal of an unanswered love?

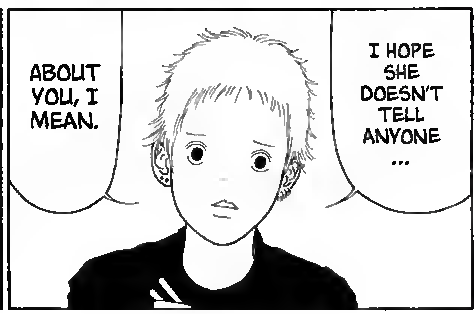
HEY, ELLIE.
DO YOU EVER WANT TO SLEEP WITH SOMEONE ELSE?

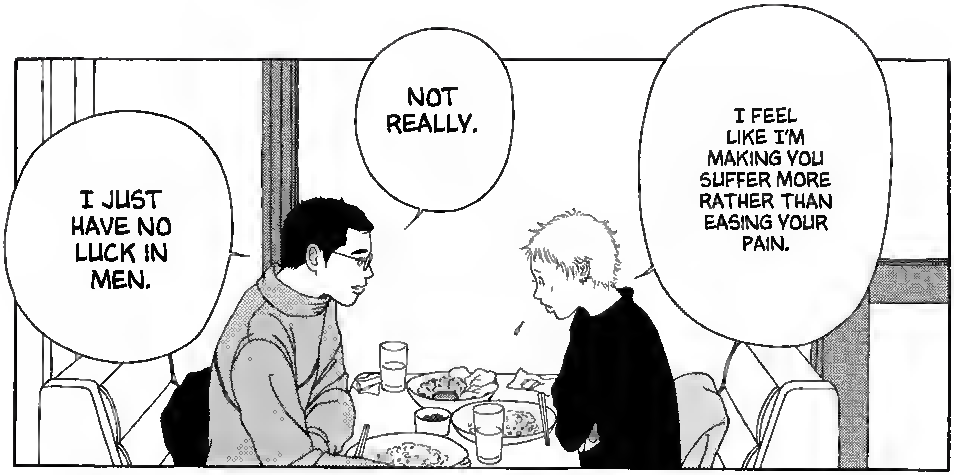

BECAUSE I WANT YOU TO ALWAYS WANT ME.
NO.
WHY?
...I WANT YOU TO FEEL THAT I'M THE ONLY ONE FOR YOU.
WHEN-EVER, WHER-EVER...
GOT IT?

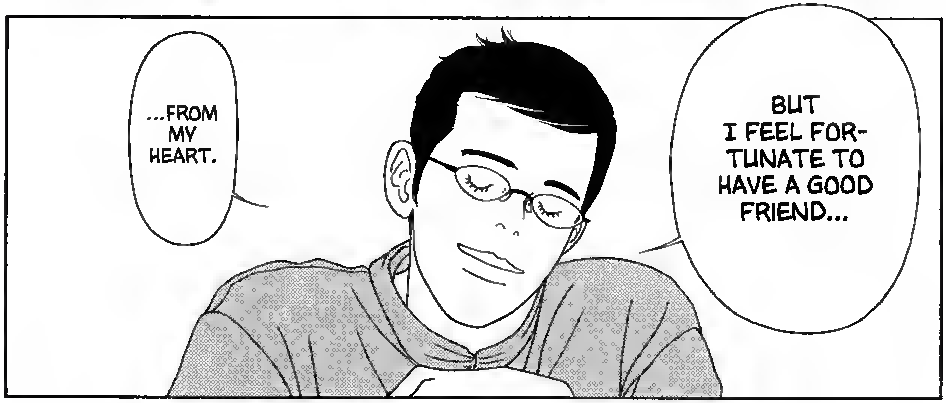

I'M THINKING ABOUT IT.

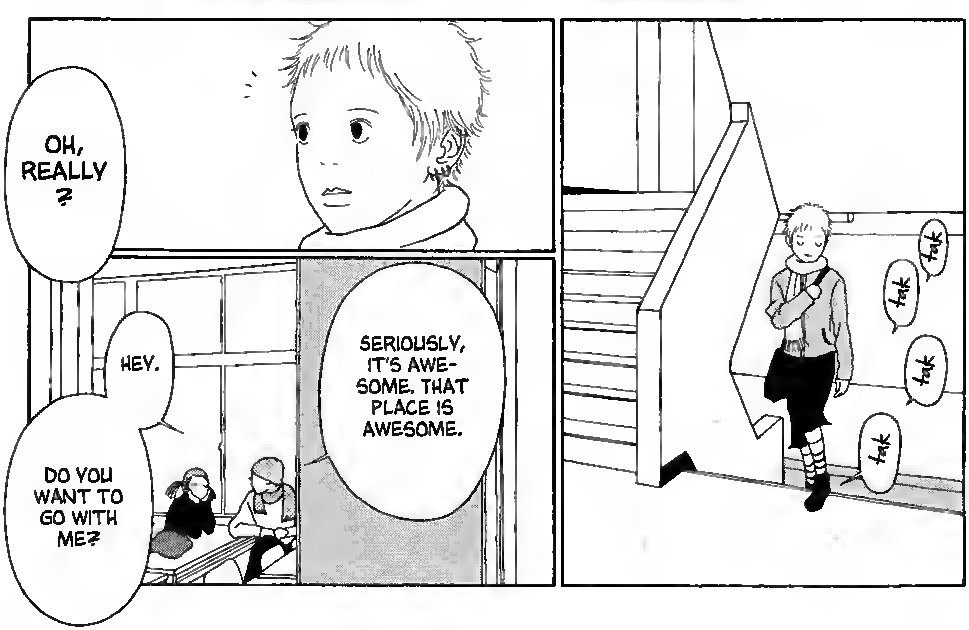

YEAH, YUKAKO UNDER-STOOD.
PROBLEM SOLVED?


WORRY ABOUT IT LATER.
REMEM-BER WHAT YOU ALWAYS TELL ME?


ABOUT YOU, I MEAN.
I HOPE SHE DOESN'T TELL ANYONE ...

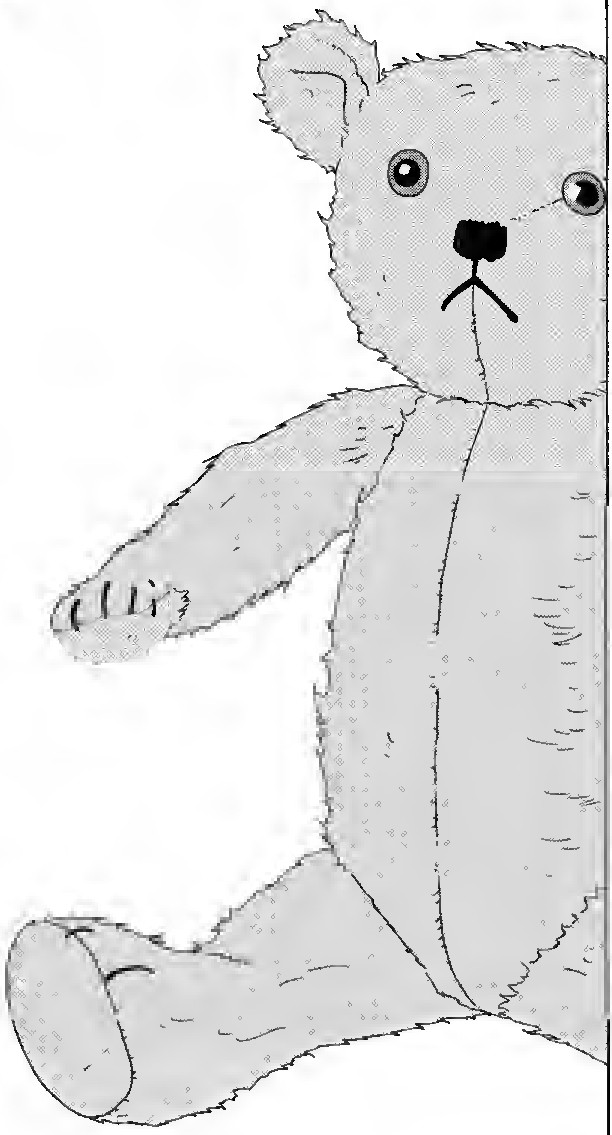

I JUST HAVE NO LUCK IN MEN.
NOT REALLY.
I FEEL LIKE I'M MAKING YOU SUFFER MORE RATHER THAN EASING YOUR PAIN.

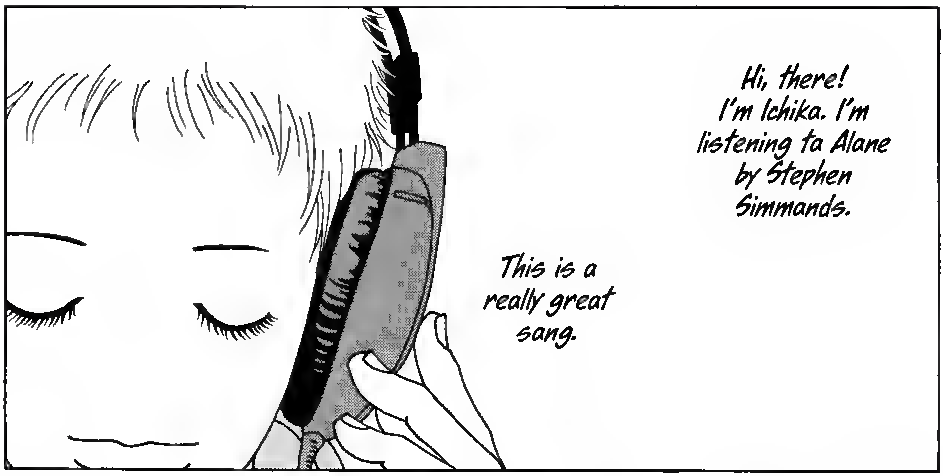

...FROM MY HEART.
BUT I FEEL FOR-TUNATE TO HAVE A GOOD FRIEND...

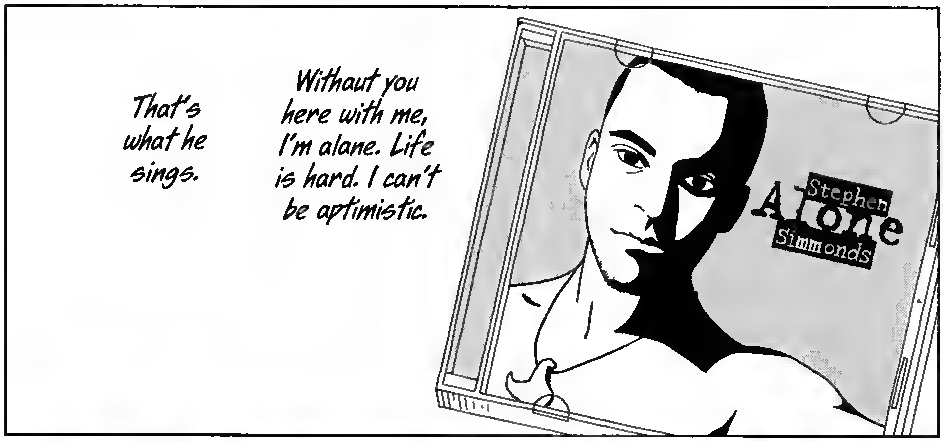

OH, REALLY?
HEY.
DO YOU WANT TO GO WITH ME?
SERIOUSLY, IT'S AWE-SOME. THAT PLACE IS AWESOME.
tak
tak
tak

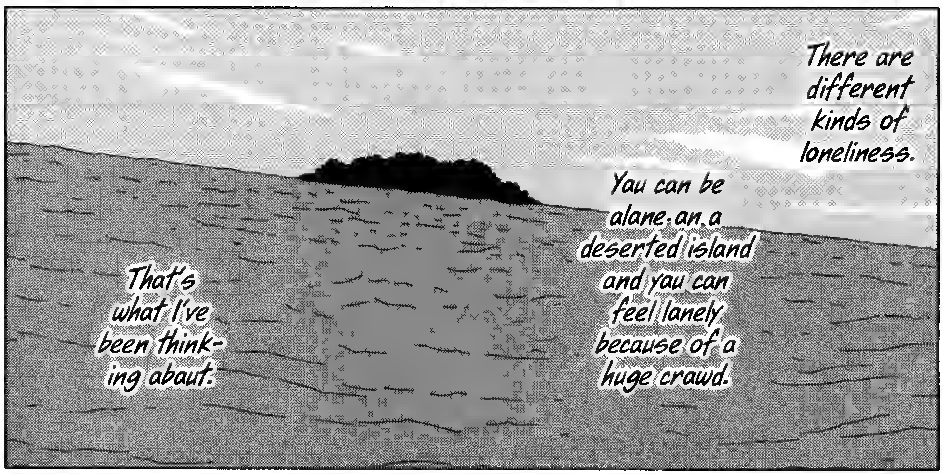
HMM.
YOU'LL HAVE A BLAST, YUKAKO!
She's so shy!
Ellie frowns whenever I tell her how nice she is.
Take-chan started looking for a new partner.
The town is sparkling with Christmas lights.
I decided to think this way.

Chapter 7: *Alone*

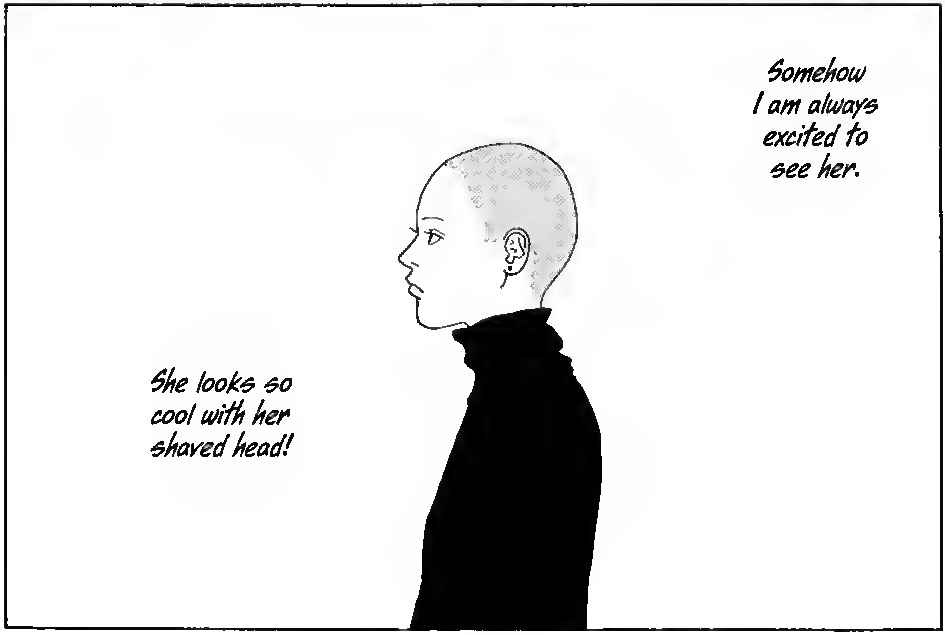


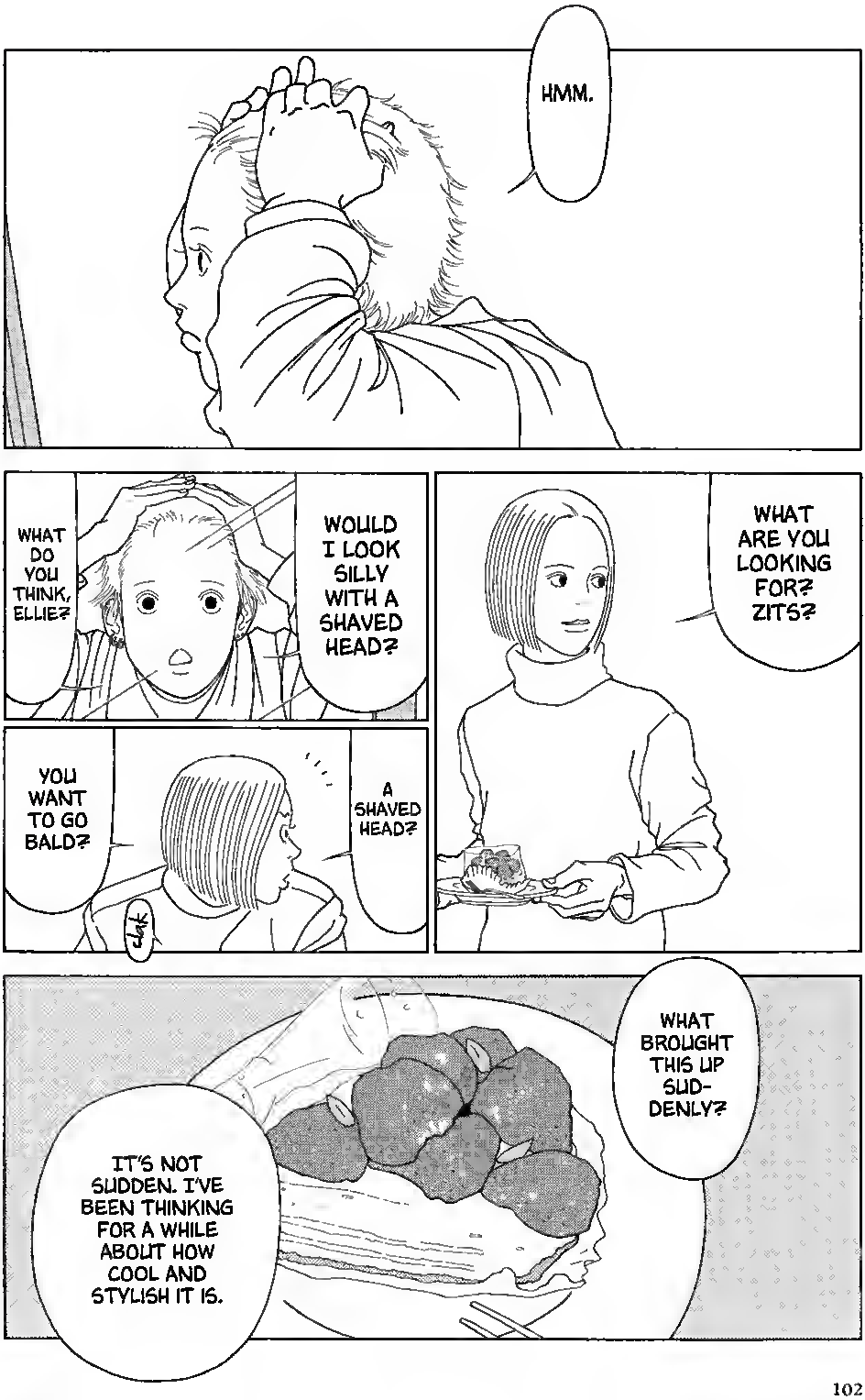

Hi, there! I'm Ichika. I'm listening ta Alane by Stephen Simmands.
This is a really great sang.

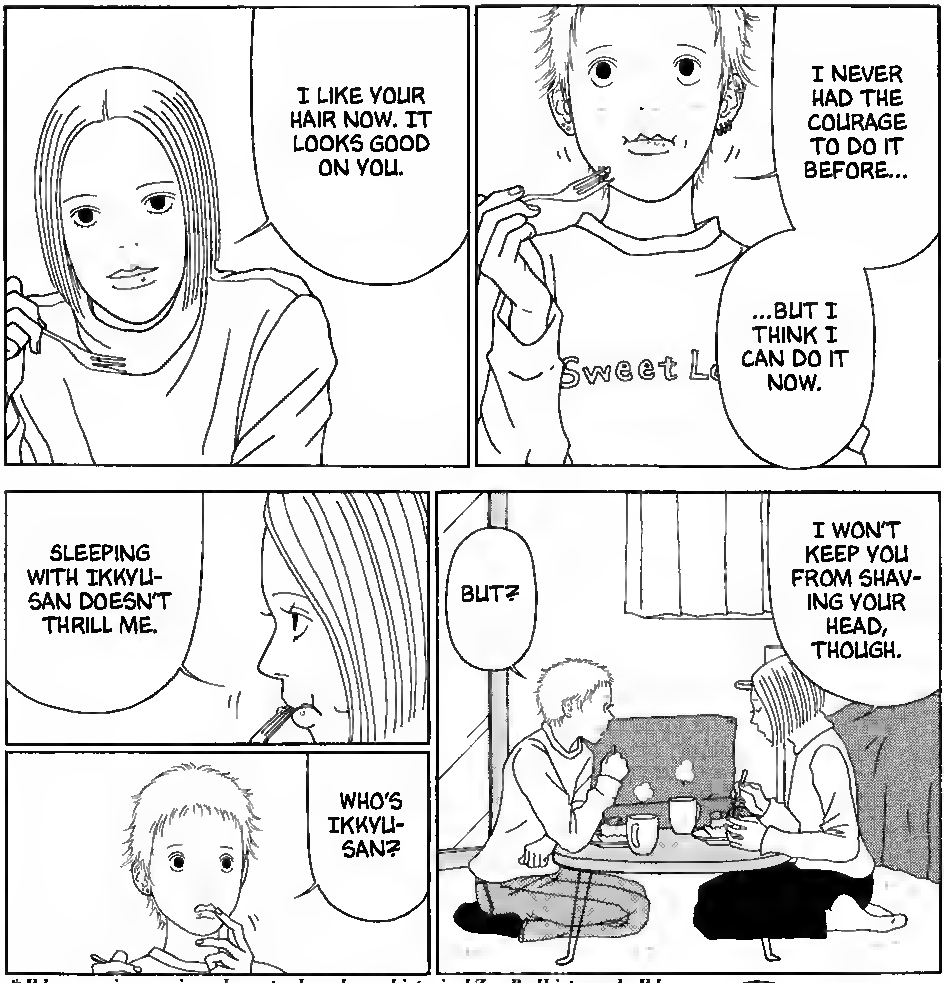

That's what he sings.
Without you here with me, I'm alane. Life is hard. I can't be optimistic.
Stephen
Alone
Simmonds


There are different kinds of loneliness.
You can be alane on a deserted island and you can feel lanely because of a huge crawd.
That's what I've been think-ing about.

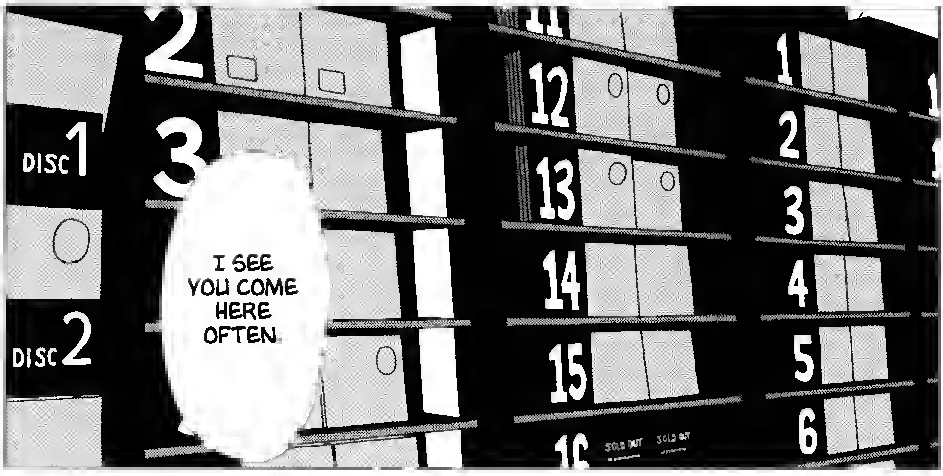
I don't mean to change the subject, but I've been watching this new, gorgeous customer at a CD shop where I work.


Somehow I am always excited to see her.
She looks so cool with her shaved head!


HMM.
WHAT DO YOU THINK, ELLIE?
WOULD I LOOK SILLY WITH A SHAVED HEAD?
YOU WANT TO GO BALD?
A SHAVED HEAD?
WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR? ZITS?
WHAT BROUGHT THIS UP SUD-DENLY?
IT'S NOT SUDDEN. I'VE BEEN THINKING FOR A WHILE ABOUT HOW COOL AND STYLISH IT IS.

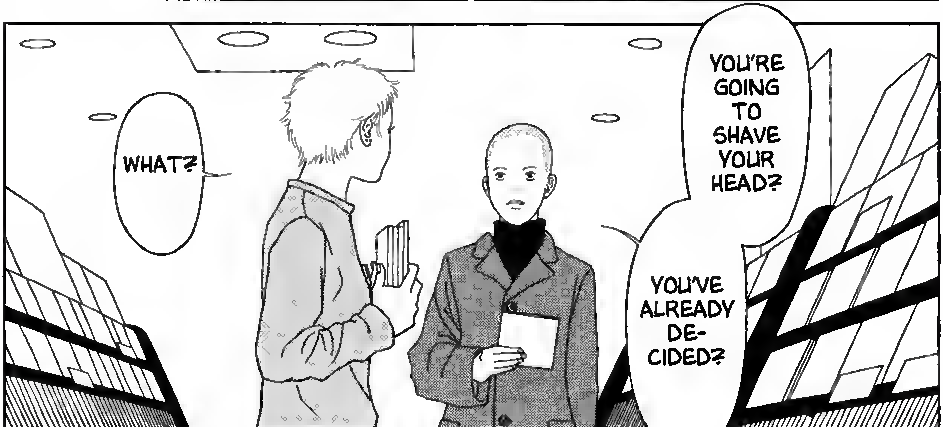

I LIKE YOUR HAIR NOW. IT LOOKS GOOD ON YOU.
I NEVER HAD THE COURAGE TO DO IT BEFORE...
...BUT I THINK I CAN DO IT NOW.
SLEEPING WITH IKKYU-SAN DOESN'T THRILL ME.
WHO'S IKKYU-SAN?
BUT?
I WON'T KEEP YOU FROM SHAVING YOUR HEAD, THOUGH.

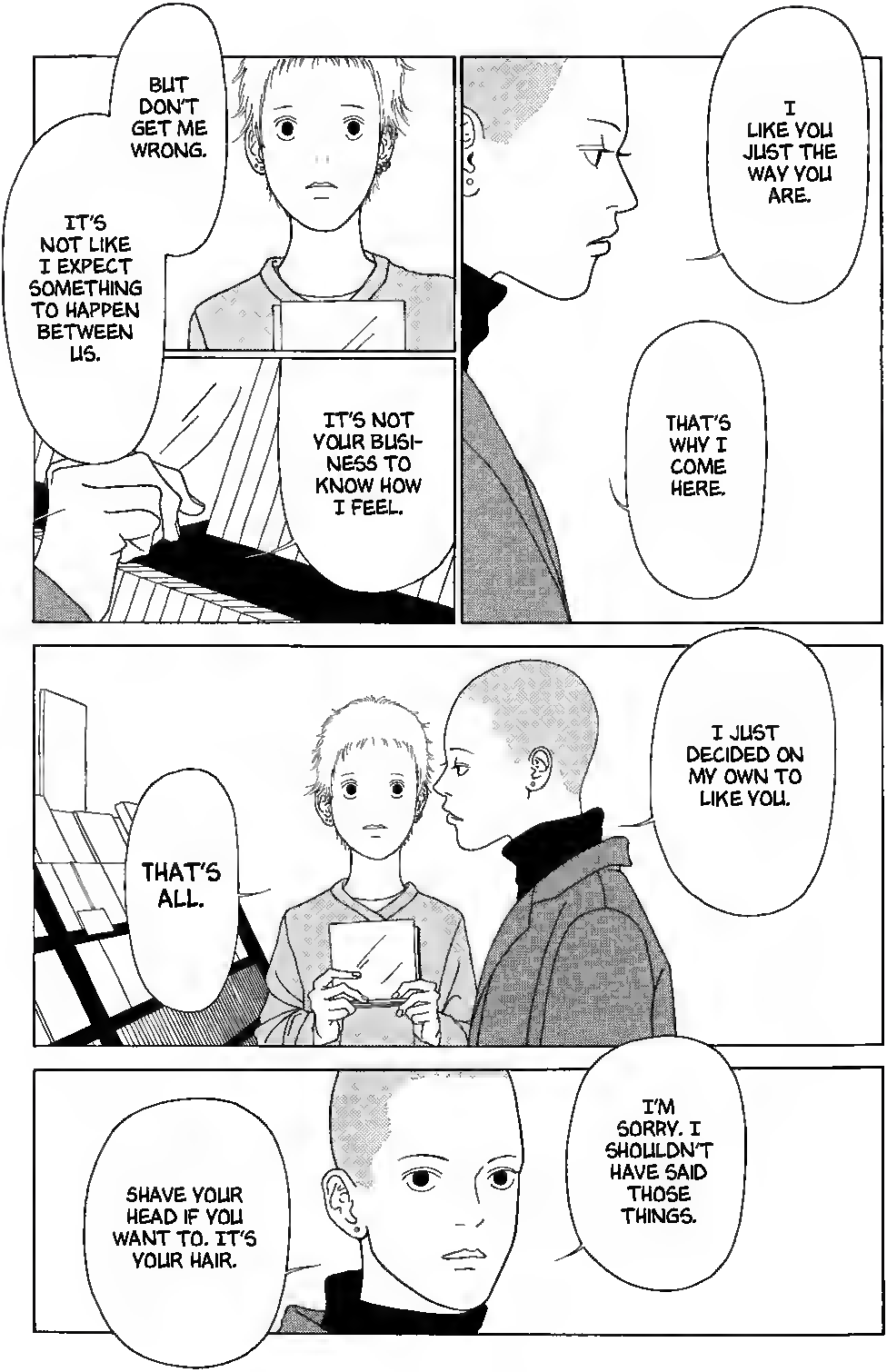
** Ikkyu-san is an anime character based on a historical Zen Budhist monk, Ikkyu.*


DISC 1
DISC 2
I SEE YOU COME HERE OFTEN.

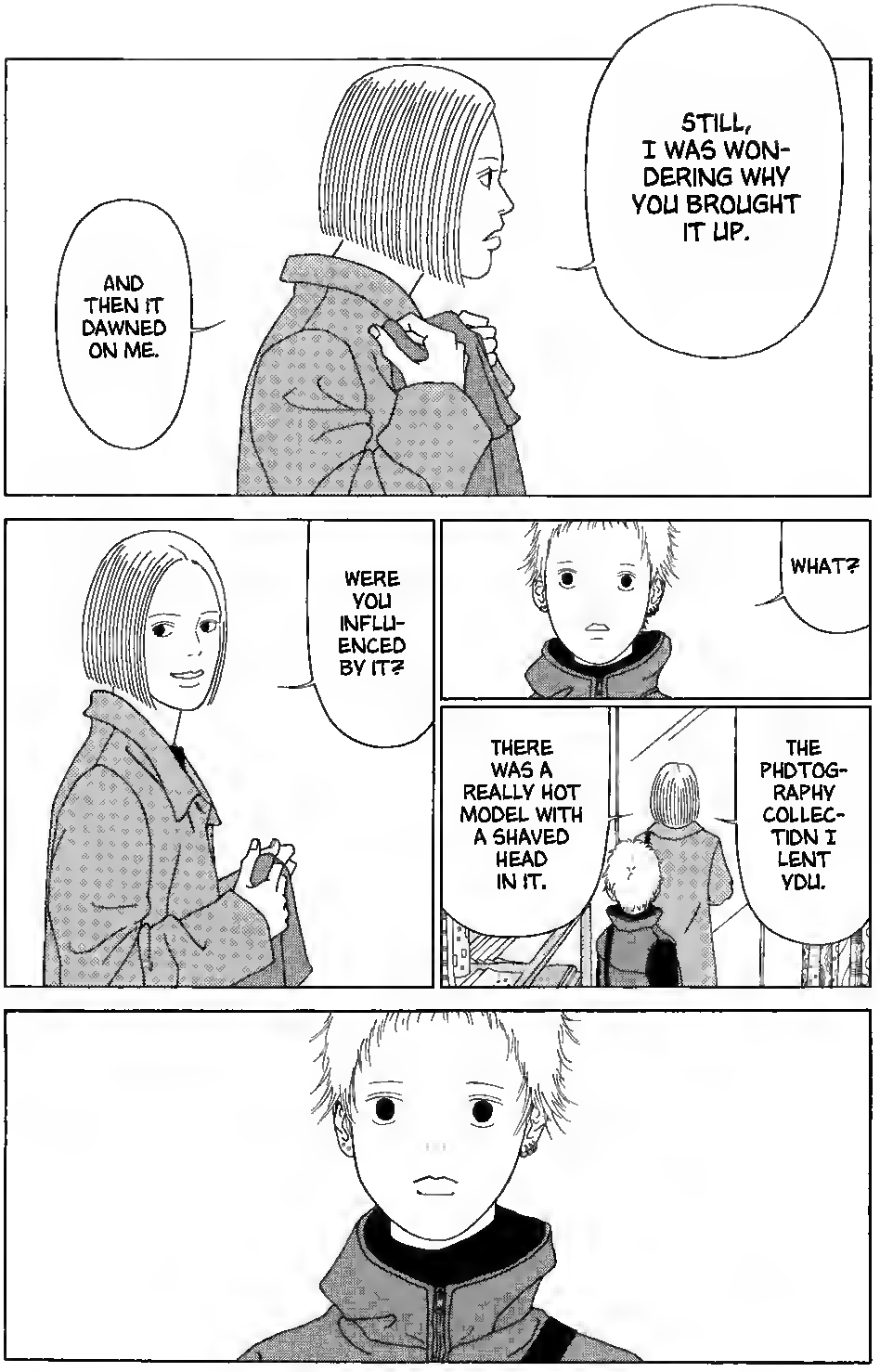
I'M THINKING OF DOING THE SAME THING.
YOU HAVE SUCH A COOL HAIRDO.

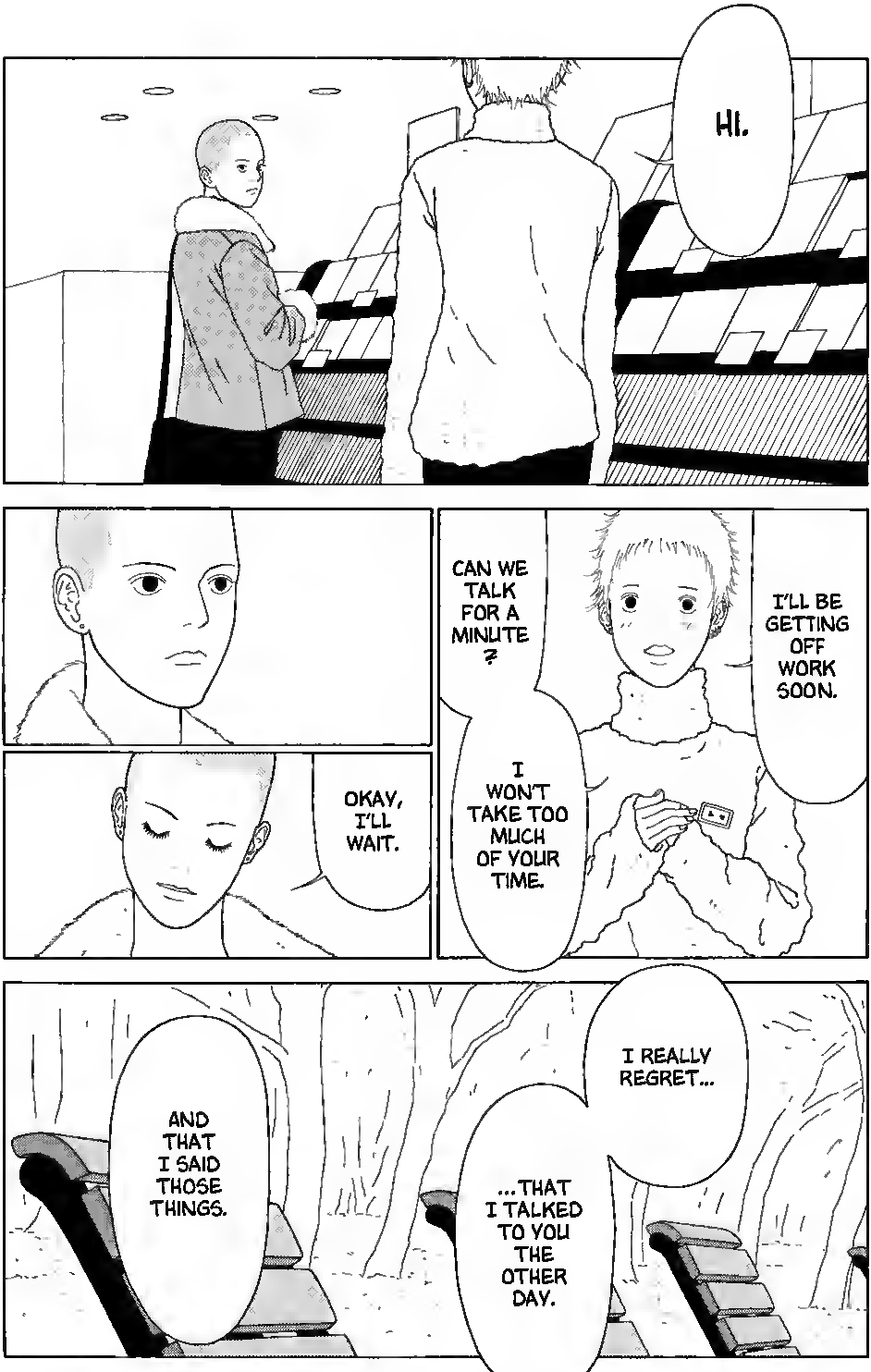
HUH?


WHAT?
YOU'RE GOING TO SHAVE YOUR HEAD?
YOU'VE ALREADY DE-CIDED?

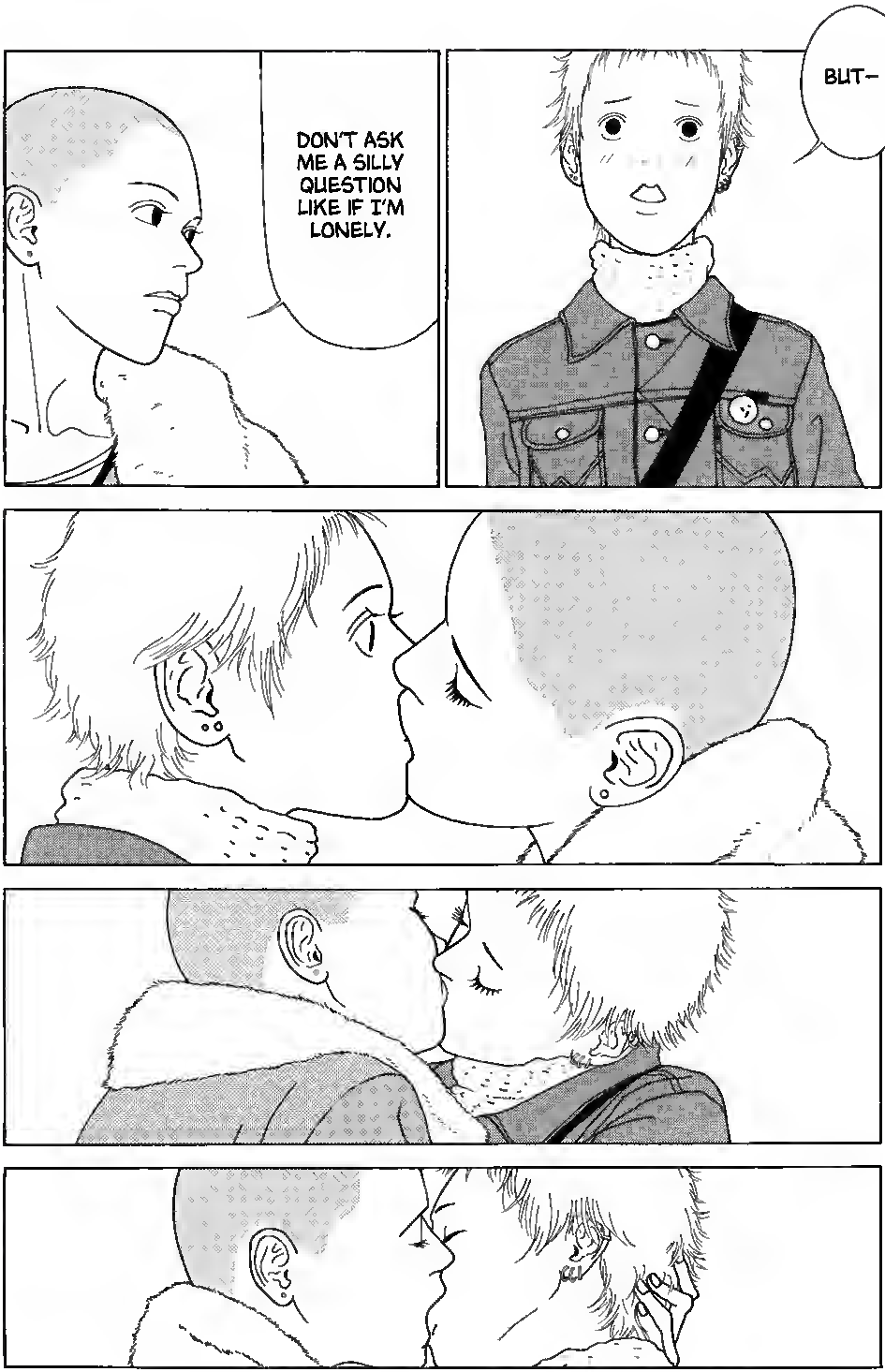

I LIKE YOU JUST THE WAY YOU ARE.
THAT'S WHY I COME HERE.
BUT DON'T GET ME WRONG.
IT'S NOT LIKE I EXPECT SOMETHING TO HAPPEN BETWEEN US.
IT'S NOT YOUR BUSINESS TO KNOW HOW I FEEL.
I JUST DECIDED ON MY OWN TO LIKE YOU.
THAT'S ALL.
I'M SORRY. I SHOULDN'T HAVE SAID THOSE THINGS.
SHAVE YOUR HEAD IF YOU WANT TO. IT'S YOUR HAIR.

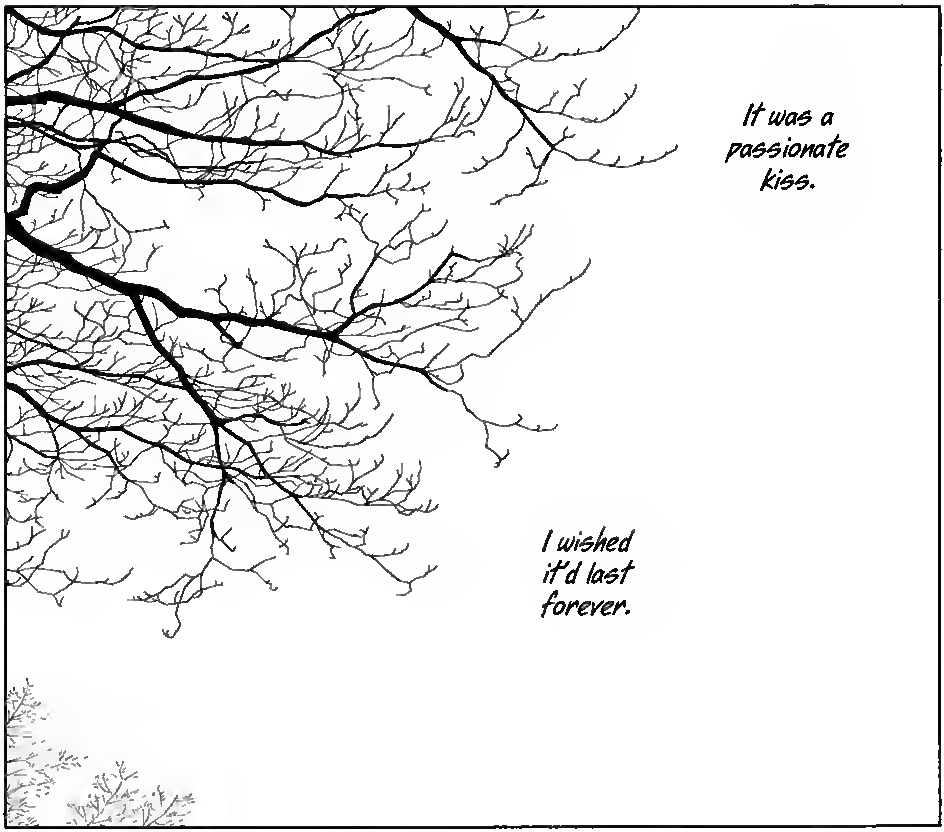
OH. SO YOU DECIDED NOT TO SHAVE YOUR HEAD AFTER ALL?
YOU SEEMED TO HATE THE IDEA.
WHAT? IT'S MY FAULT?
BUT YOU SEEMED INTENT ON SHAVING YOUR HEAD THE OTHER DAY.
WELL, FIRST OFF, IT'S CRAZY TO GO BALD IN THE MIDDLE OF WINTER.
AND I CHANGED MY MIND. IF YOU LIKE MY STYLE NOW, MAYBE IT'S NOT SO BAD.
AND HERE I WAS THINKING THAT IKKYU-SAN MIGHT BE CUTE.
I'M NOT IKKYU-SAN!

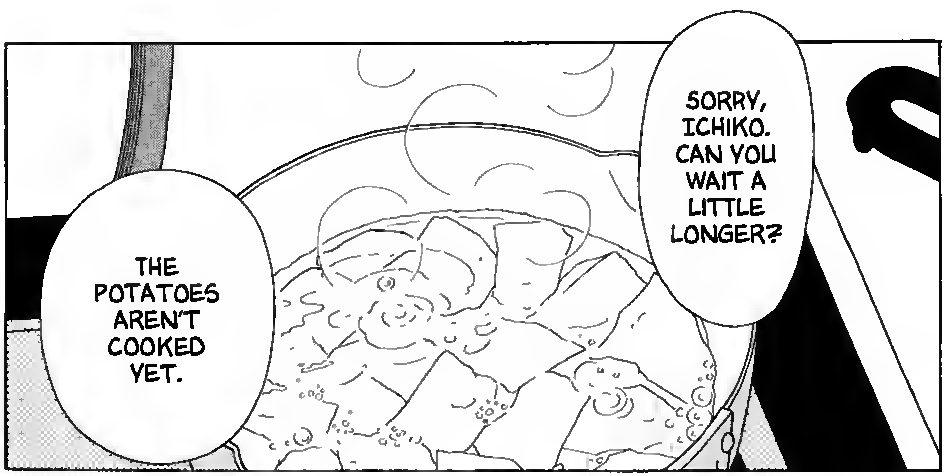

STILL, I WAS WONDERING WHY YOU BROUGHT IT UP.
AND THEN IT DAWNED ON ME.
WERE YOU INFLUENCED BY IT?
WHAT?
THERE WAS A REALLY HOT MODEL WITH A SHAVED HEAD IN IT.
THE PHOTOGRAPHY COLLECTION I LENT YOU.

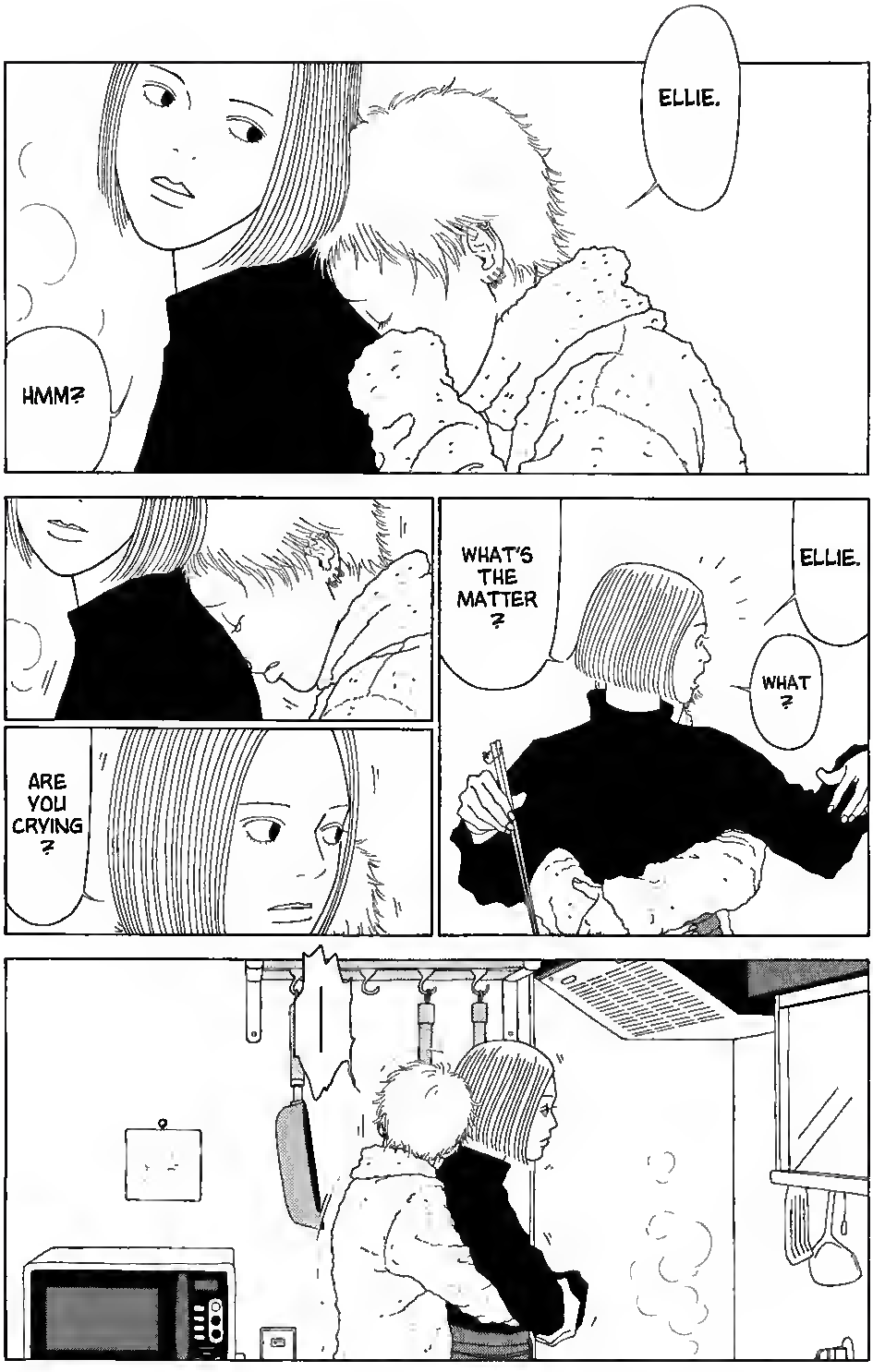

Hi.
I'LL BE GETTING OFF WORK SOON.
CAN WE TALK FOR A MINUTE?
I WON'T TAKE TOO MUCH OF YOUR TIME.
OKAY, I'LL WAIT.
I REALLY REGRET...
...THAT I TALKED TO YOU THE OTHER DAY.
AND THAT I SAID THOSE THINGS.

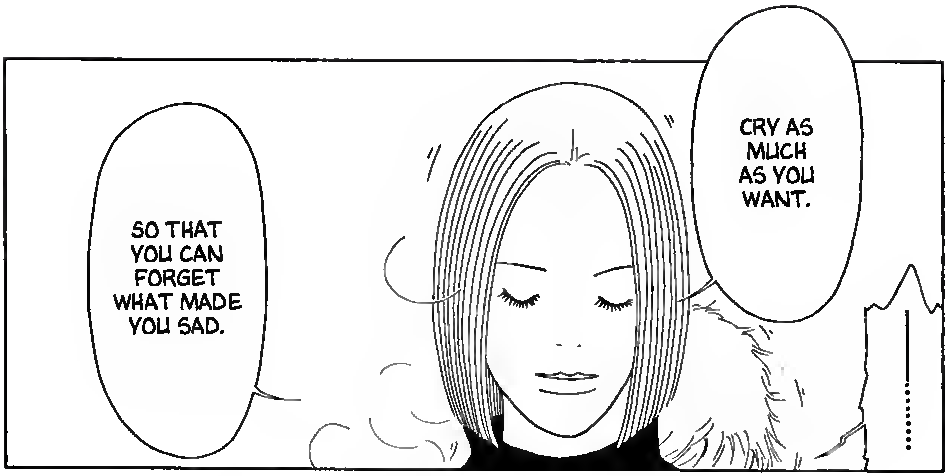
I DON'T INTEND TO GET TO KNOW YOU.
I DON'T WANT YOU TO TAKE INTEREST IN ME, EITHER.
WHY?
I FEEL LONELINESS WHEN I'M WITH SOMEONE. IF I'M ALONE...
I ALWAYS WANT TO BE ALONE.
...I DON'T FEEL IT.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO UNDERSTAND.
I JUST WANTED YOU TO KNOW THAT I WON'T CHANGE MY WAY OF LIFE.


DON'T ASK ME A SILLY QUESTION LIKE IF I'M LONELY.
BUT—


It was a passionate kiss.
I wished it'd last forever.


THE POTATOES AREN'T COOKED YET.
SORRY, ICHIKO. CAN YOU WAIT A LITTLE LONGER?

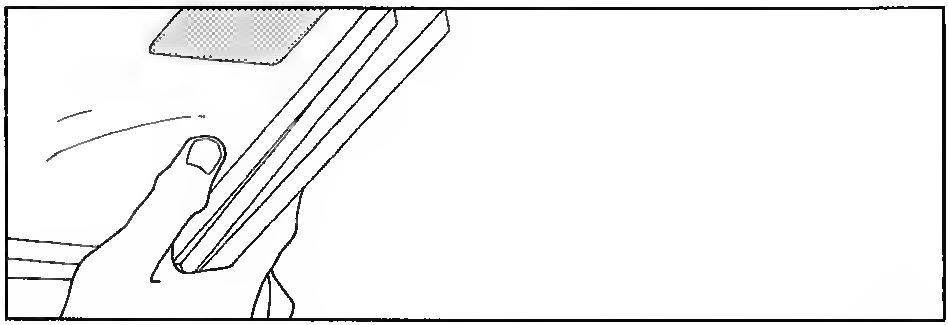

ELLIE.
HMM?
WHAT'S THE MATTER ?
ELLIE.
WHAT ?
ARE YOU CRYING ?

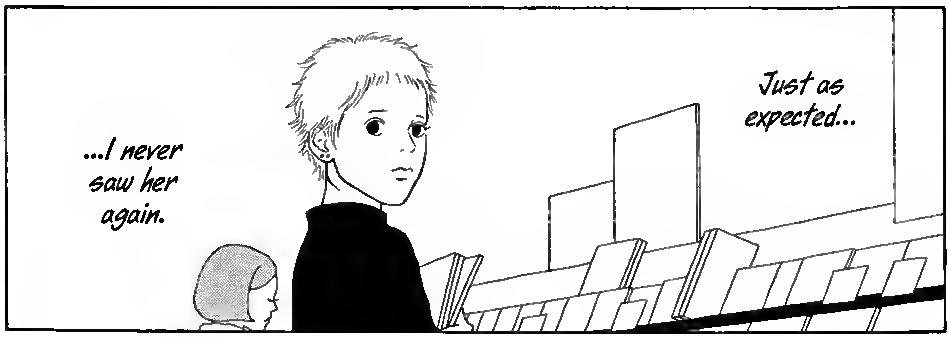


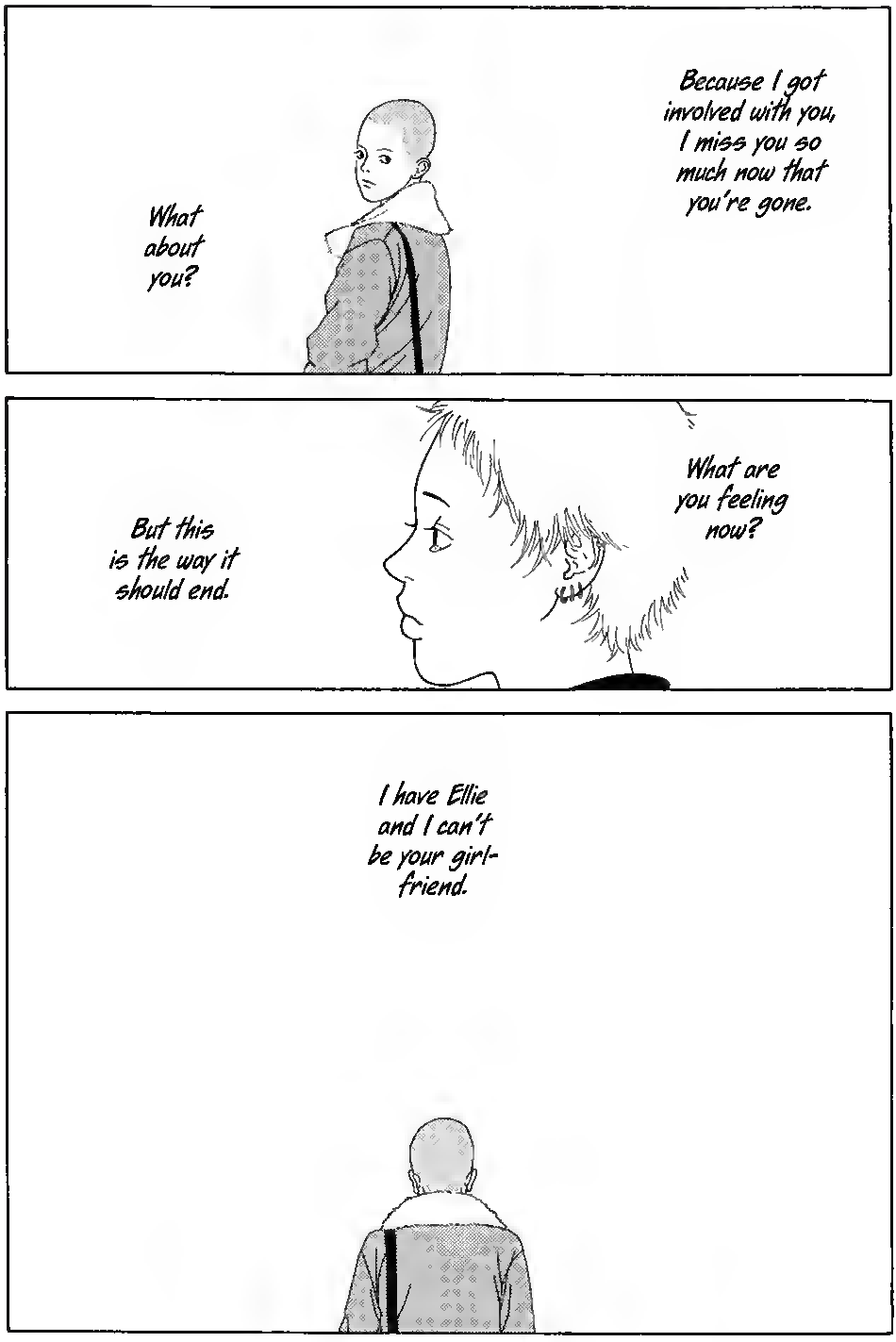
I didn't tell Ellie.

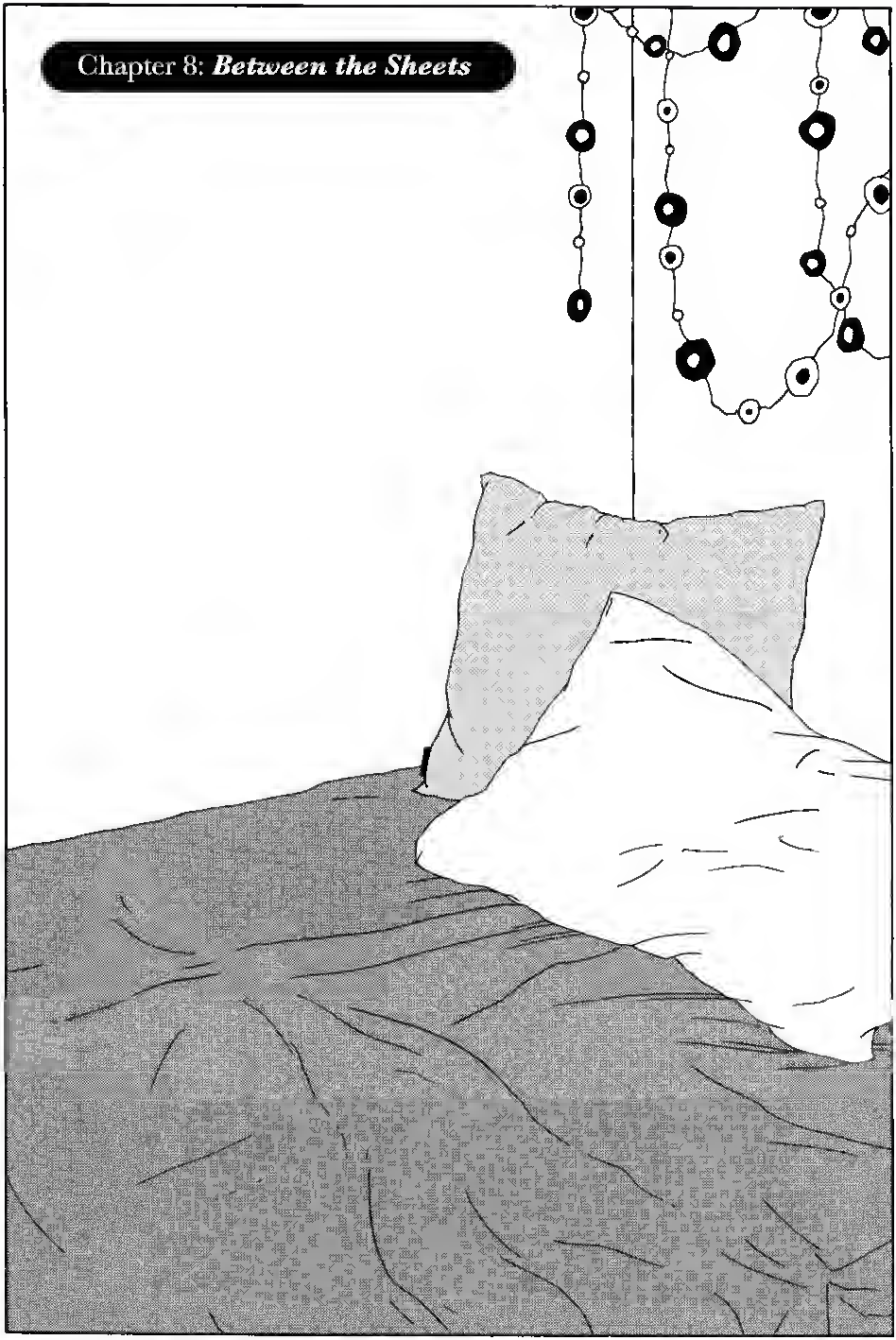
I may be wrong, but I didn't want her to have any connection with that woman.

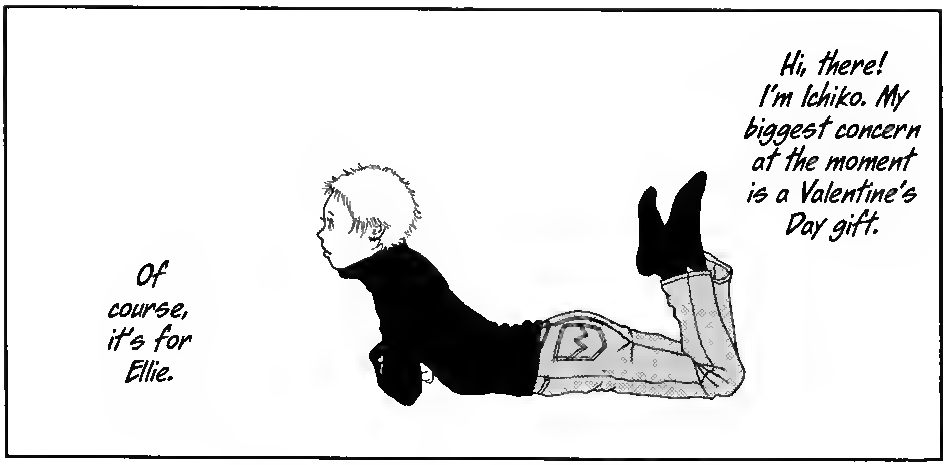
I want to keep them in separate worlds.

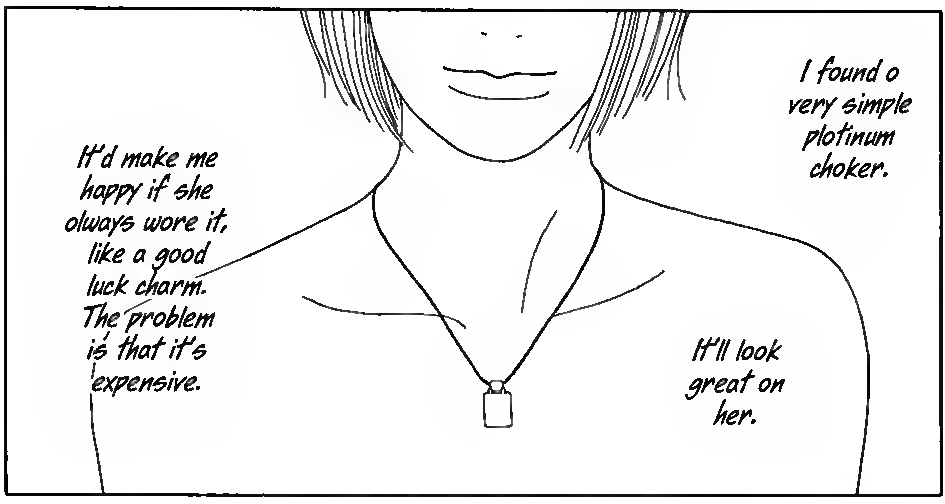


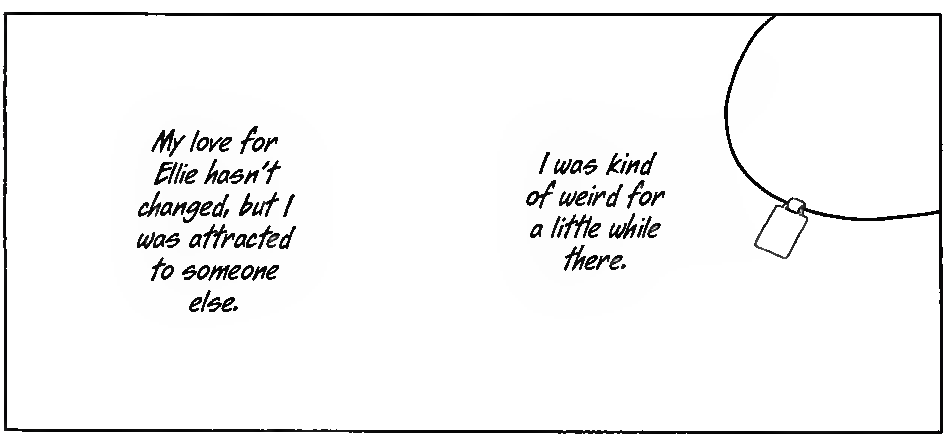



What about you?
Because I got involved with you, I miss you so much now that you're gone.
But this is the way it should end.
What are you feeling now?
I have Ellie and I can't be your girl-friend.

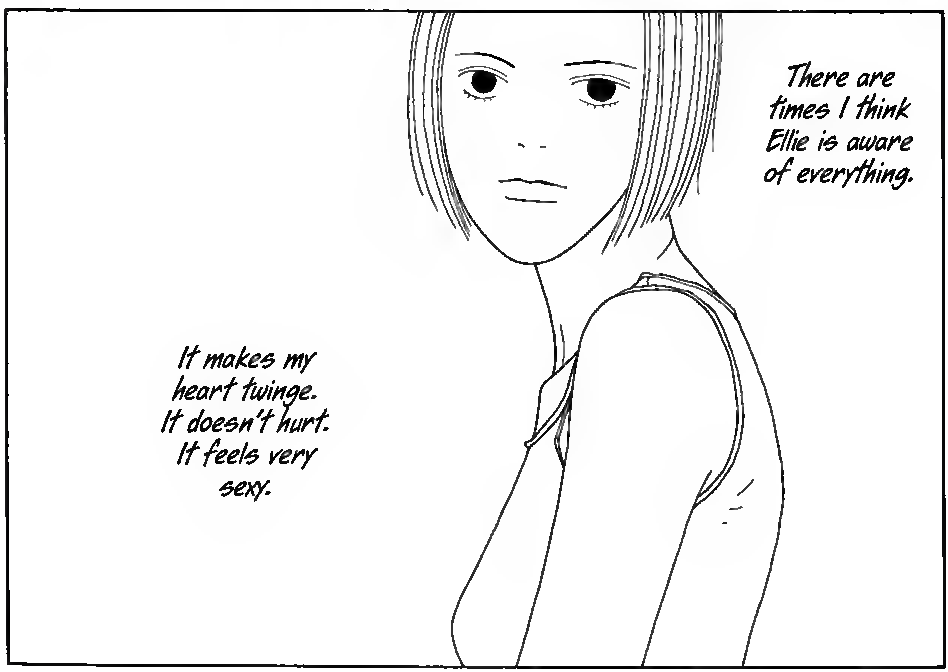

Chapter 8: *Between the Sheets*

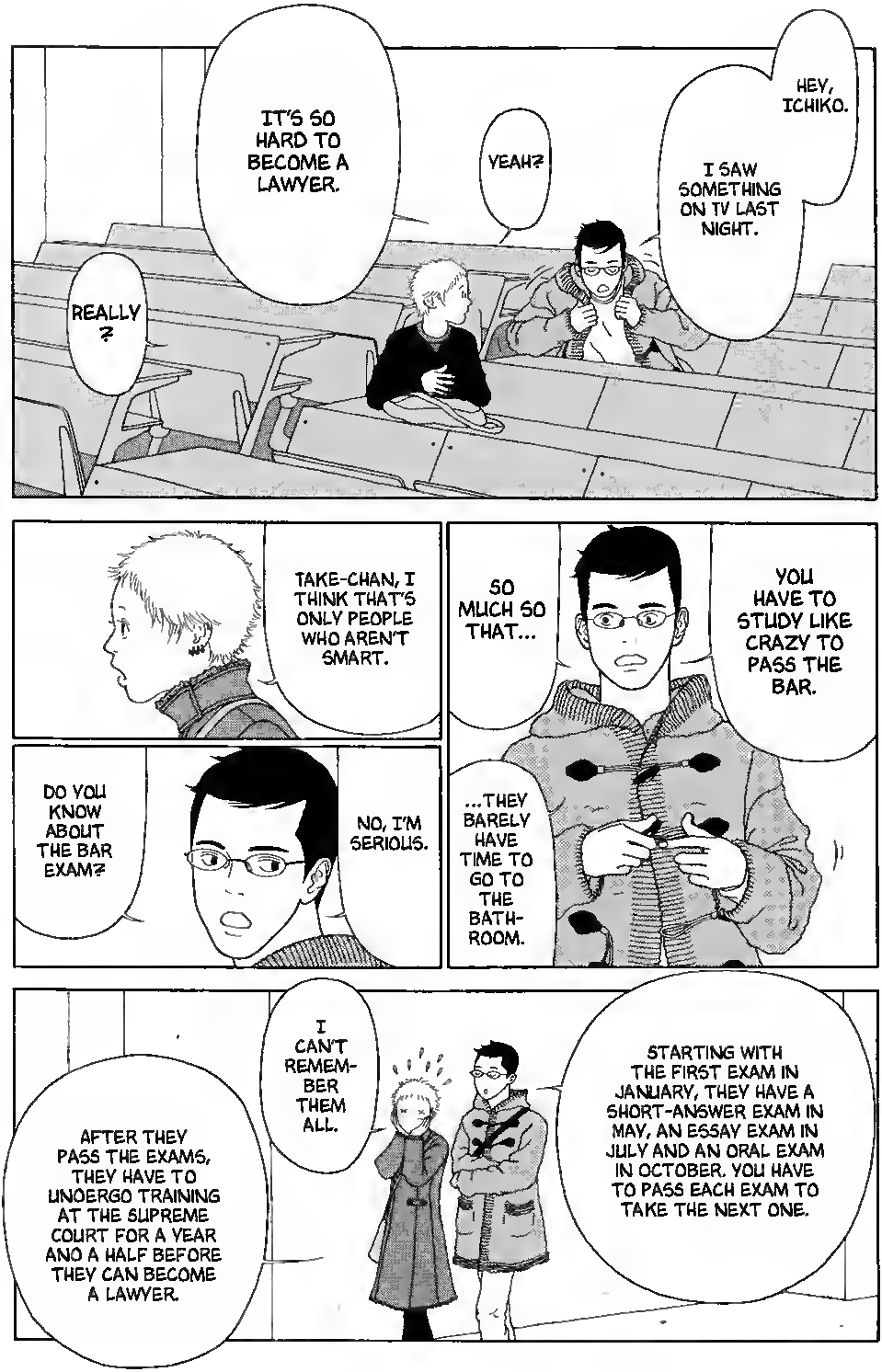

Hi, there! I'm Ichiko. My biggest concern at the moment is a Valentine's Day gift.
Of course, it's for Ellie.


I found o very simple plotinum choker.
It'd make me happy if she always wore it, like a good luck charm. The problem is that it's expensive.
It'll look great on her.

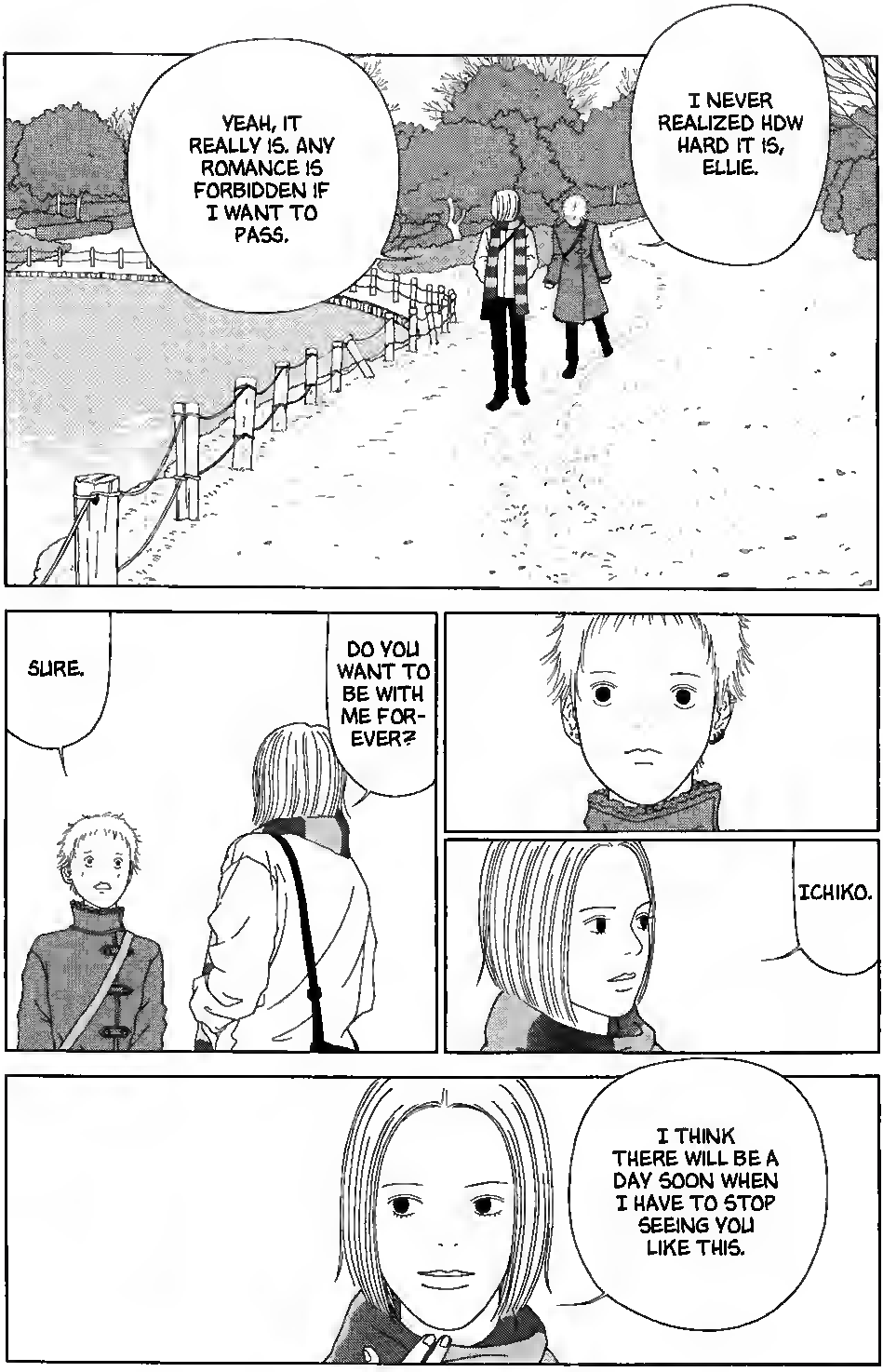

My love for Ellie hasn't changed, but I was attracted to someone else.
I was kind of weird for a little while there.

I can't explain it, so I decided to sweep it under the carpet.
毎朝新聞
居酒屋
酔々門


There are times I think Ellie is aware of everything.
It makes my heart twinge. It doesn't hurt. It feels very sexy.


HEY, ICHIKO.
I SAW SOMETHING ON TV LAST NIGHT.
YEAH?
IT'S SO HARD TO BECOME A LAWYER.
REALLY?
TAKE-CHAN, I THINK THAT'S ONLY PEOPLE WHO AREN'T SMART.
YOU HAVE TO STUDY LIKE CRAZY TO PASS THE BAR.
SO MUCH SO THAT...
...THEY BARELY HAVE TIME TO GO TO THE BATH-ROOM.
DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE BAR EXAM?
NO, I'M SERIOUS.
STARTING WITH THE FIRST EXAM IN JANUARY, THEY HAVE A SHORT-ANSWER EXAM IN MAY, AN ESSAY EXAM IN JULY AND AN ORAL EXAM IN OCTOBER. YOU HAVE TO PASS EACH EXAM TO TAKE THE NEXT ONE.
I CAN'T REMEM-BER THEM ALL.
AFTER THEY PASS THE EXAMS, THEY HAVE TO UNDERGO TRAINING AT THE SUPREME COURT FOR A YEAR AND A HALF BEFORE THEY CAN BECOME A LAWYER.

WOW, I DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT IT UNTIL YOU TOLD ME.
IT MEANS IT'S A HIGH-POWERED JOB.
WELL ...
DOES SHE HAVE TO STUDY THAT HARD EVEN WHEN SHE'S SO SMART?
ELLIE KNOWS ABOUT THIS, DOESN'T SHE?
I BET SHE DOES.
....
IT MAY NOT NECESSARILY BE TRUE. I'M SURE THERE ARE EXCEPTIONS.
WAIT A MINUTE, ICHIKO.

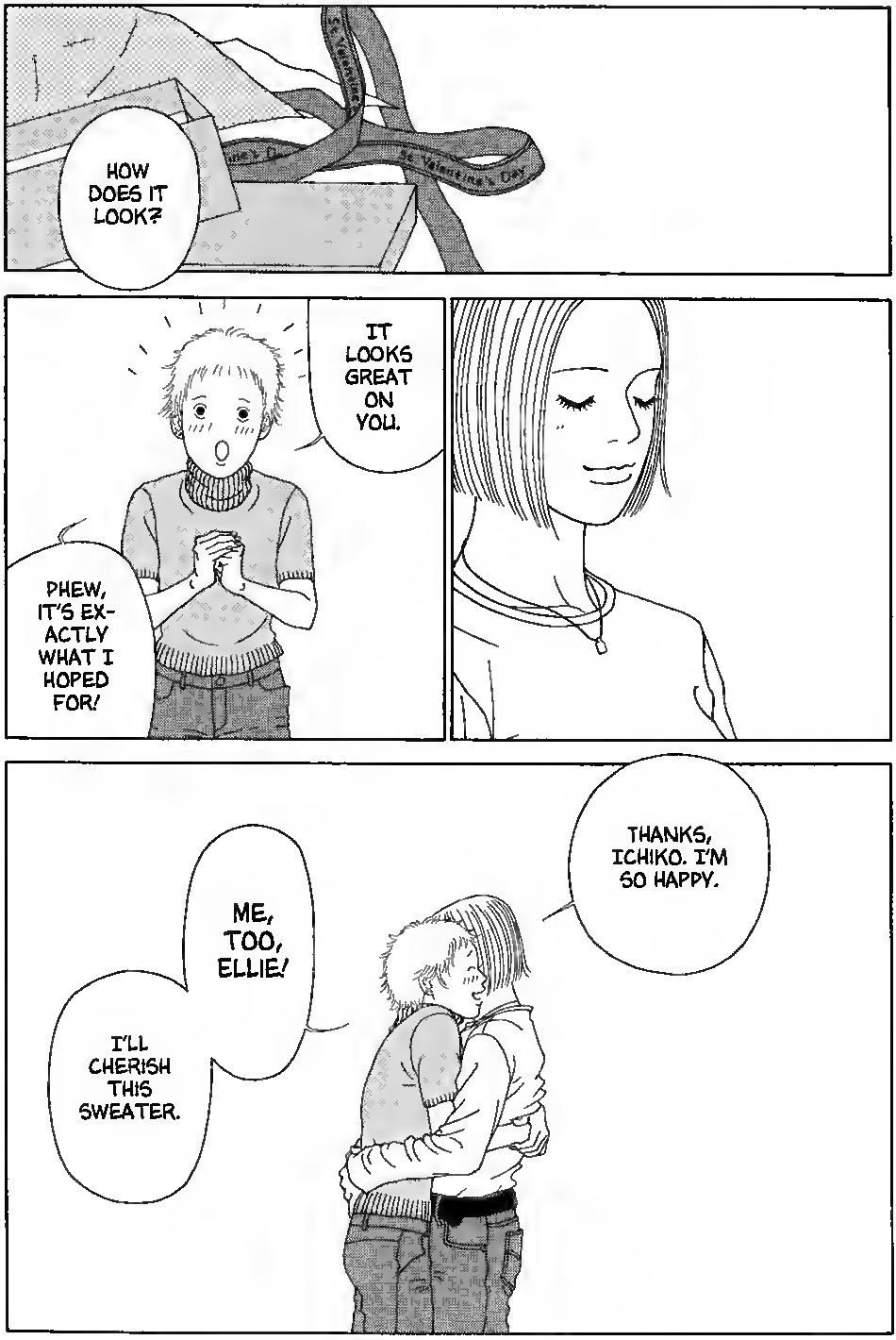

I NEVER REALIZED HOW HARD IT IS, ELLIE.
YEAH, IT REALLY IS. ANY ROMANCE IS FORBIDDEN IF I WANT TO PASS.
DO YOU WANT TO BE WITH ME FOR-EVER?
SURE.
ICHIKO.
I THINK THERE WILL BE A DAY SOON WHEN I HAVE TO STOP SEEING YOU LIKE THIS.

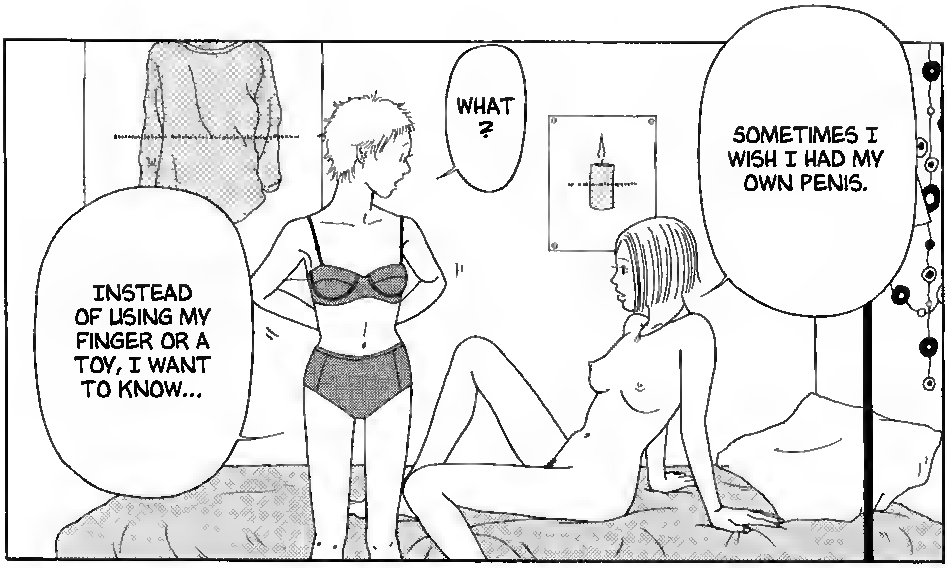
WE'RE NOT SPLITTING UP, ARE WE?
WE'LL JUST SPEND LESS TIME TOGETHER, RIGHT?
NOPE, NOT AT ALL!
IT'S NO BIG DEAL.
UH-HUH.
UH-HUH.
WE'RE TALKING A YEAR OR TWO, RIGHT? YOU'LL PASS YOUR EXAMS WITH FLYING COLORS.
UH-HUH.

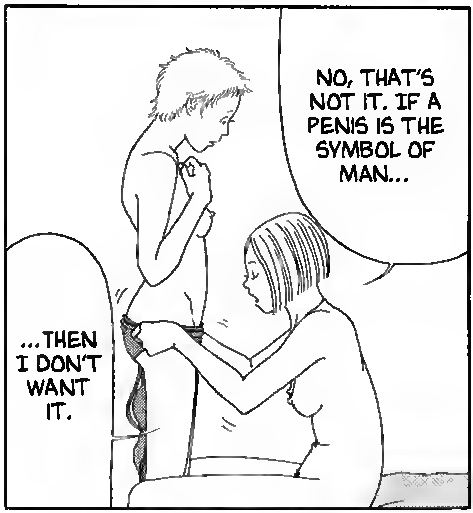
But what if I don't see her for a year? I honestly have no idea.

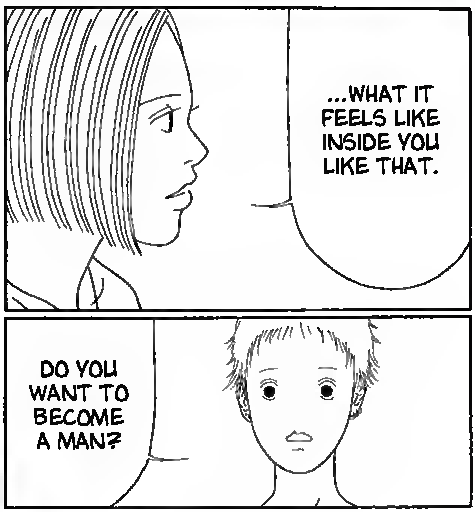
bam
bam
bam
bam
bam
IS THAT SD?
SDONER DR LATER, ELLIE WILL START CRAM-MING FDR EXAMS.
I WON'T BE ABLE TO SEE HER AS OFTEN.
HEY, DOES THIS LOOK STRAIGHT ?
I THINK BECDMING A TRANSLATDR IS JUST AS TOUGH AS BECDMING A LAWYER.
YES, IT LOOKS FINE.
BUT YOU DON'T HAVE TIME TO FOOL AROUND, EITHER.
HUH?
YOU SHOULD BOTH FORGET ABOUT EACH OTHER AND FIND NEW LOVE. YOU SHOULDN'T RACK YOUR BRAINS OVER IT.
IF YOU DRIFT APART BECAUSE YOU DON'T SEE EACH OTHER, THEN IT ISN'T MEANT TO BE.

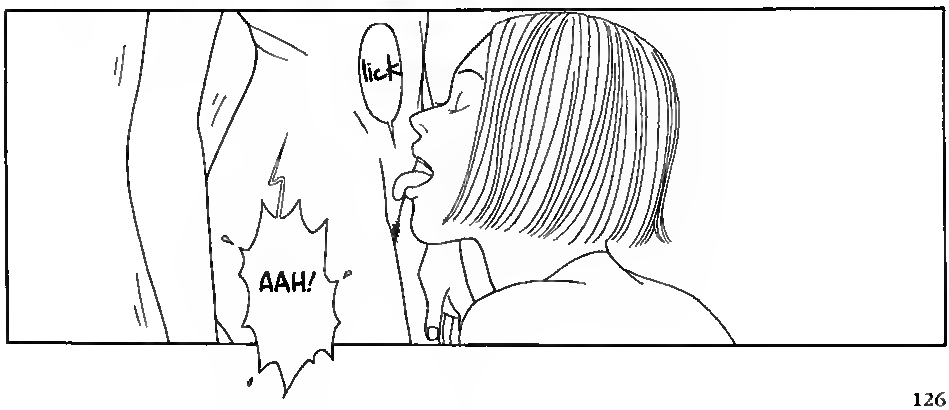
PAPA.
OH.
I NEED TO RAISE THE RIGHT SIDE.
KEEPING UP WITH ELLIE MAKES IT HARD.
YOU SHOULD ALWAYS DO THINGS AT YOUR OWN PACE.
THERE'S SO MUCH FOR YOU TO DO...
...ON YOUR OWN, TOO.

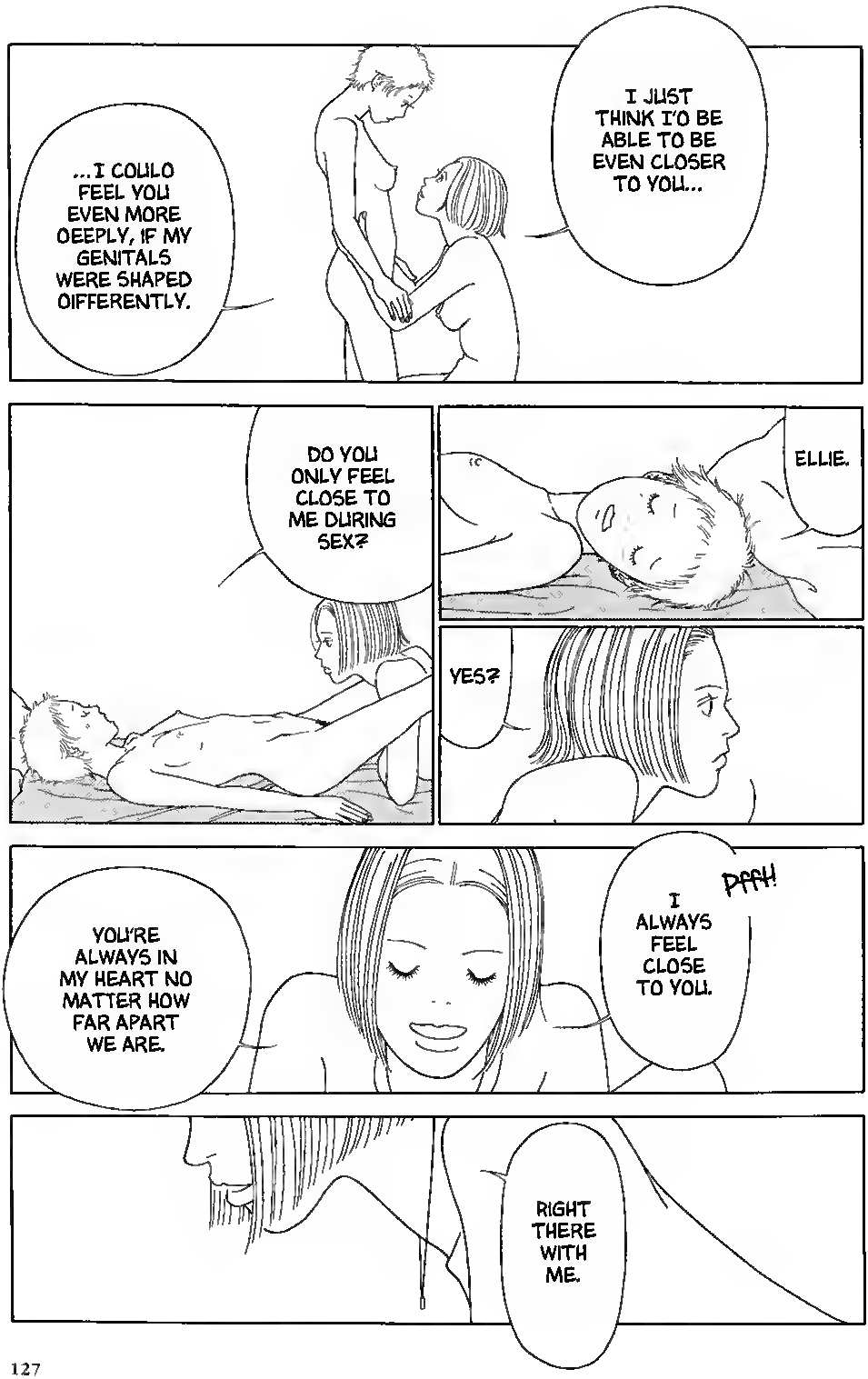

HOW DOES IT LOOK?
IT LOOKS GREAT ON YOU.
PHEW, IT'S EXACTLY WHAT I HOPED FOR!
THANKS, ICHIKO. I'M SO HAPPY.
ME, TOO, ELLIE!
I'LL CHERISH THIS SWEATER.

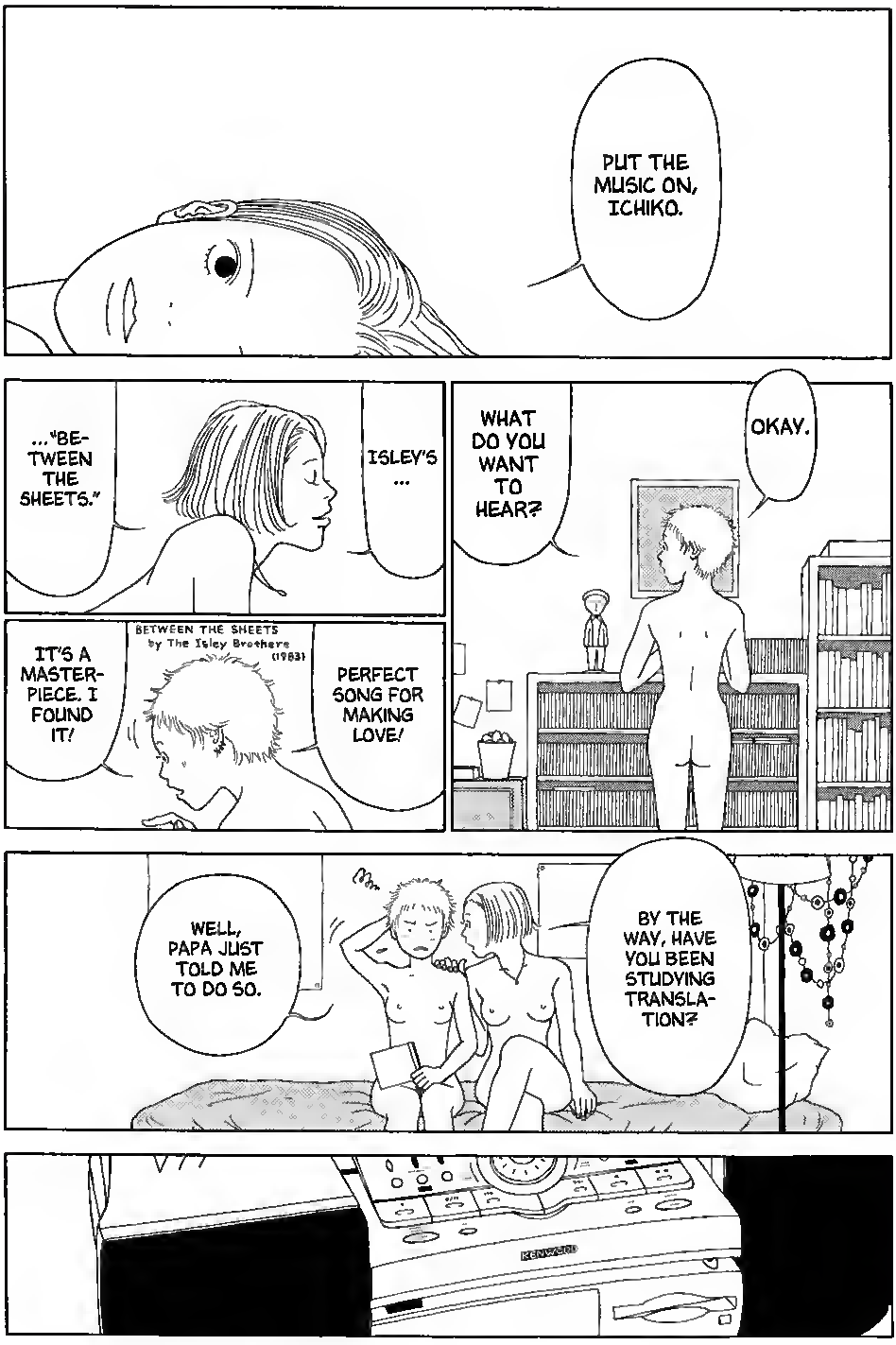

WHAT ?
SOMETIMES I WISH I HAD MY OWN PENIS.
INSTEAD OF USING MY FINGER OR A TOY, I WANT TO KNOW...

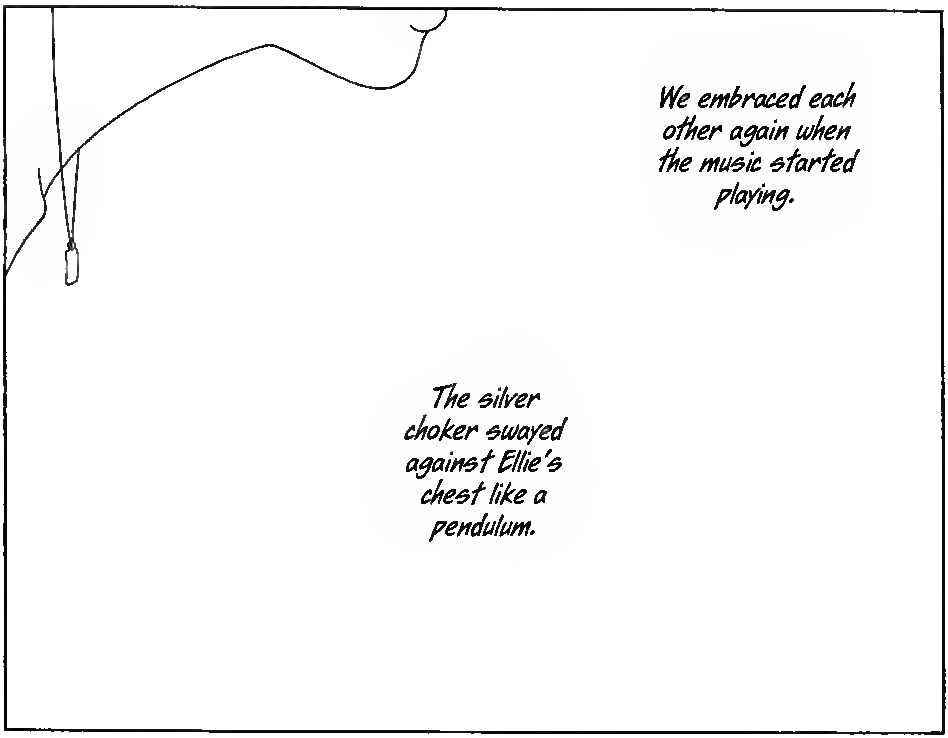

NO, THAT'S NOT IT. IF A PENIS IS THE SYMBOL OF MAN...
...THEN I DON'T WANT IT.


...WHAT IT FEELS LIKE INSIDE YOU LIKE THAT.
DO YOU WANT TO BECOME A MAN?

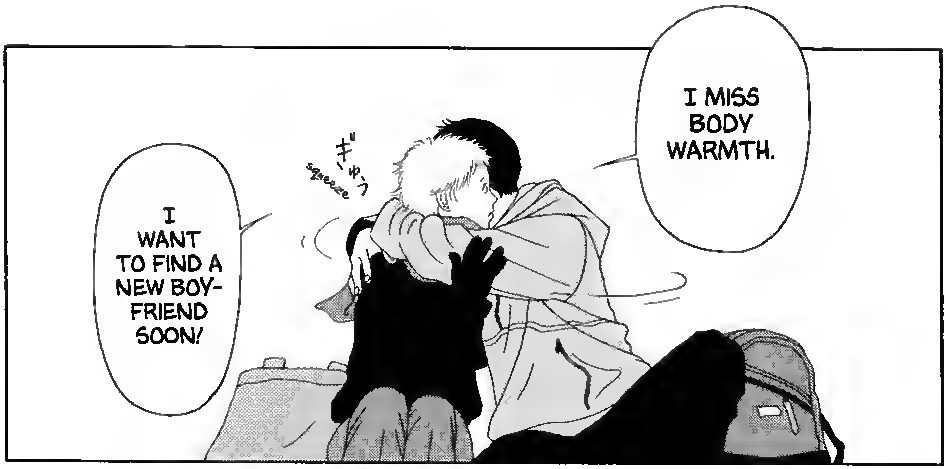

lick
AAH!


I JUST THINK I'D BE ABLE TO BE EVEN CLOSER TO YOU...
...I COULD FEEL YOU EVEN MORE DEEPLY, IF MY GENITALS WERE SHAPED DIFFERENTLY.
ELLIE.
DO YOU ONLY FEEL CLOSE TO ME DURING SEX?
YES?
PFFH!
I ALWAYS FEEL CLOSE TO YOU.
YOU'RE ALWAYS IN MY HEART NO MATTER HOW FAR APART WE ARE.
RIGHT THERE WITH ME.


PUT THE MUSIC ON, ICHIKO.
OKAY.
WHAT DO YOU WANT TO HEAR?
ISLEY'S ...
..."BE-TWEEN THE SHEETS."
BETWEEN THE SHEETS by The Isley Brothers (1983)
IT'S A MASTER-PIECE. I FOUND IT!
PERFECT SONG FOR MAKING LOVE!
BY THE WAY, HAVE YOU BEEN STUDYING TRANSLA-TION?
WELL, PAPA JUST TOLD ME TO DO SO.
KENWOOD

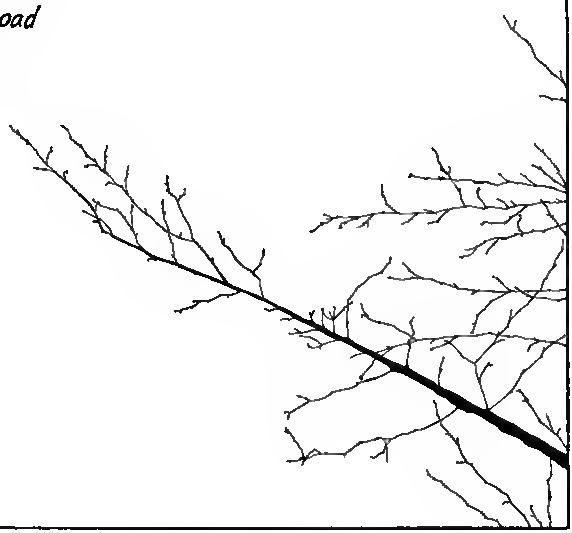

We embraced each other again when the music started playing.
The silver choker swayed against Ellie's chest like a pendulum.

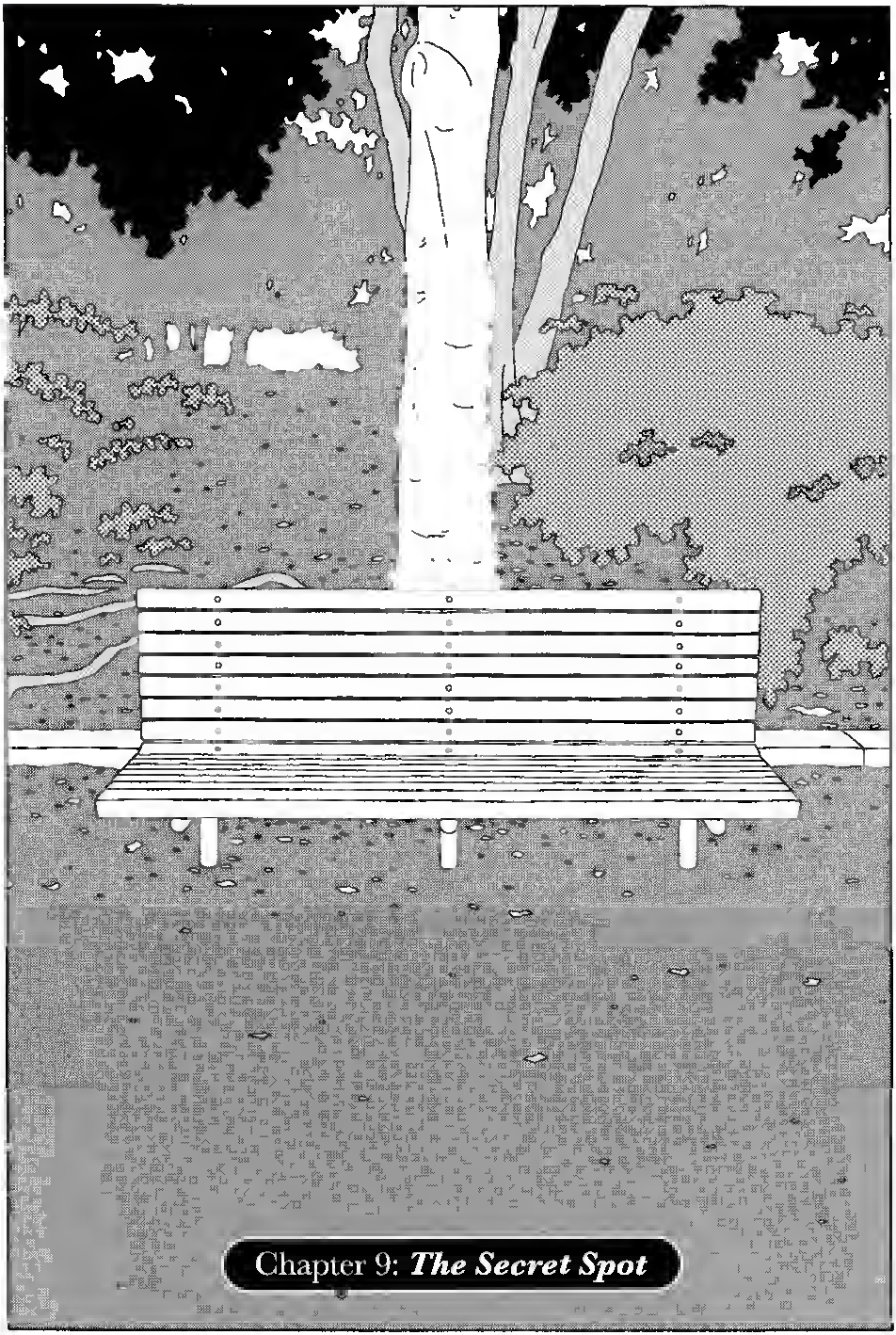
JUST FOR A FEW MIN-UTES?
HEY, CAN I HUG YOU?
OKAY.
OH?
I'M SORRY THAT IT'S A DAY LATE. I THOUGHT I'D SEE YOU YESTERDAY.
I'M SO HAPPY TO GET CHOCO-LATE FROM YOU.
NO PROBLEM AT ALL.

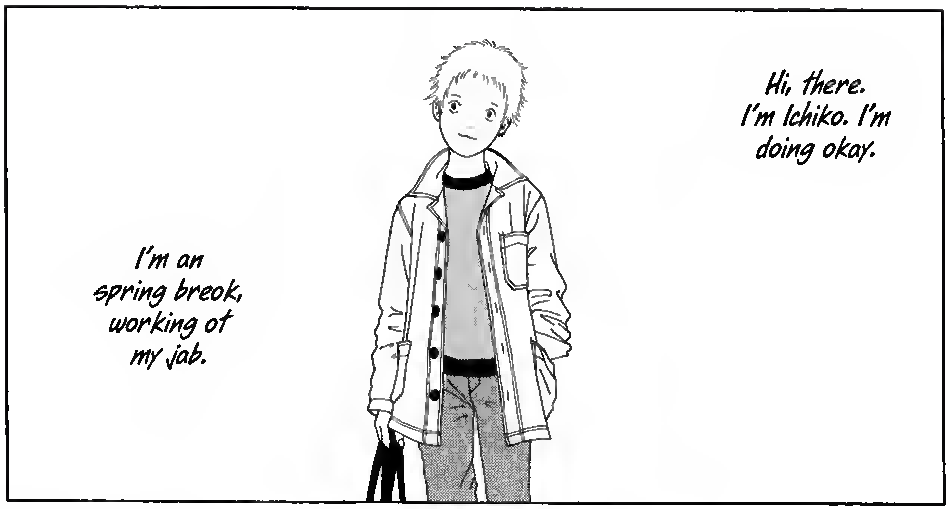


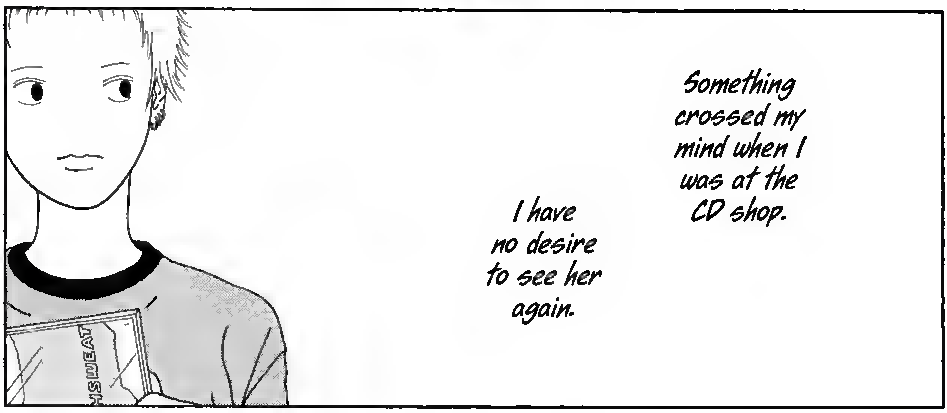
The wind is cold and there's no sign of spring yet.

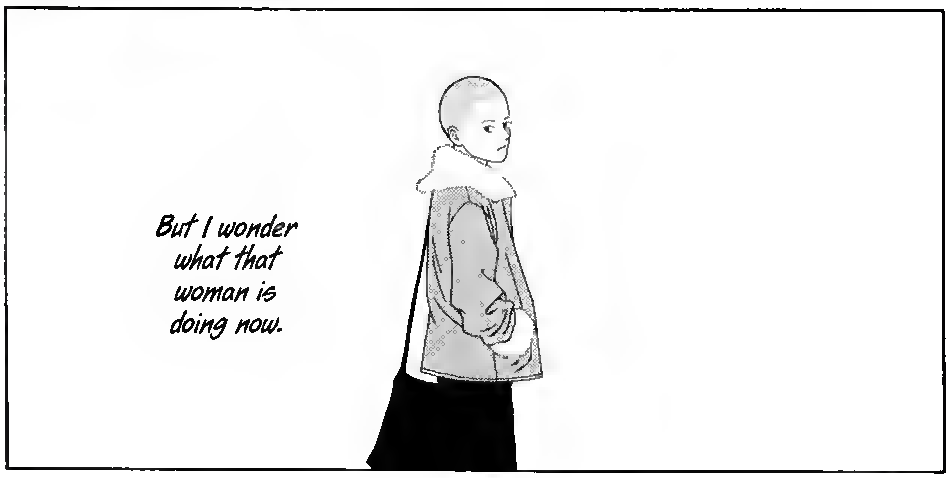
I must look fortunate to Take-chan's eyes. I wrapped my arms around his broad back, too.



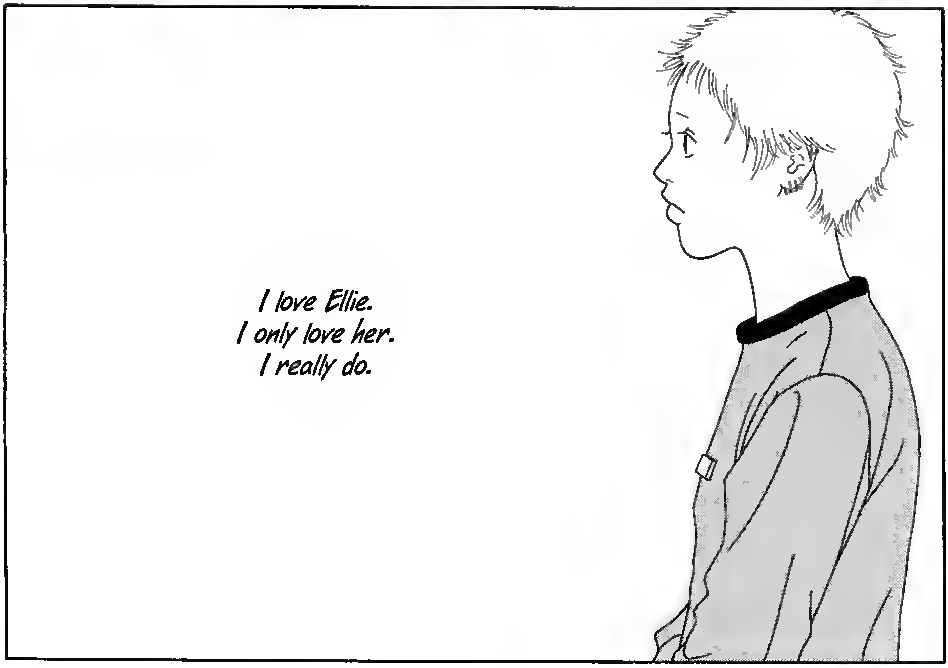

Chapter 9: *The Secret Spot*


Hi, there. I'm Ichiko. I'm doing okay.
I'm an spring breok, working ot my jab.

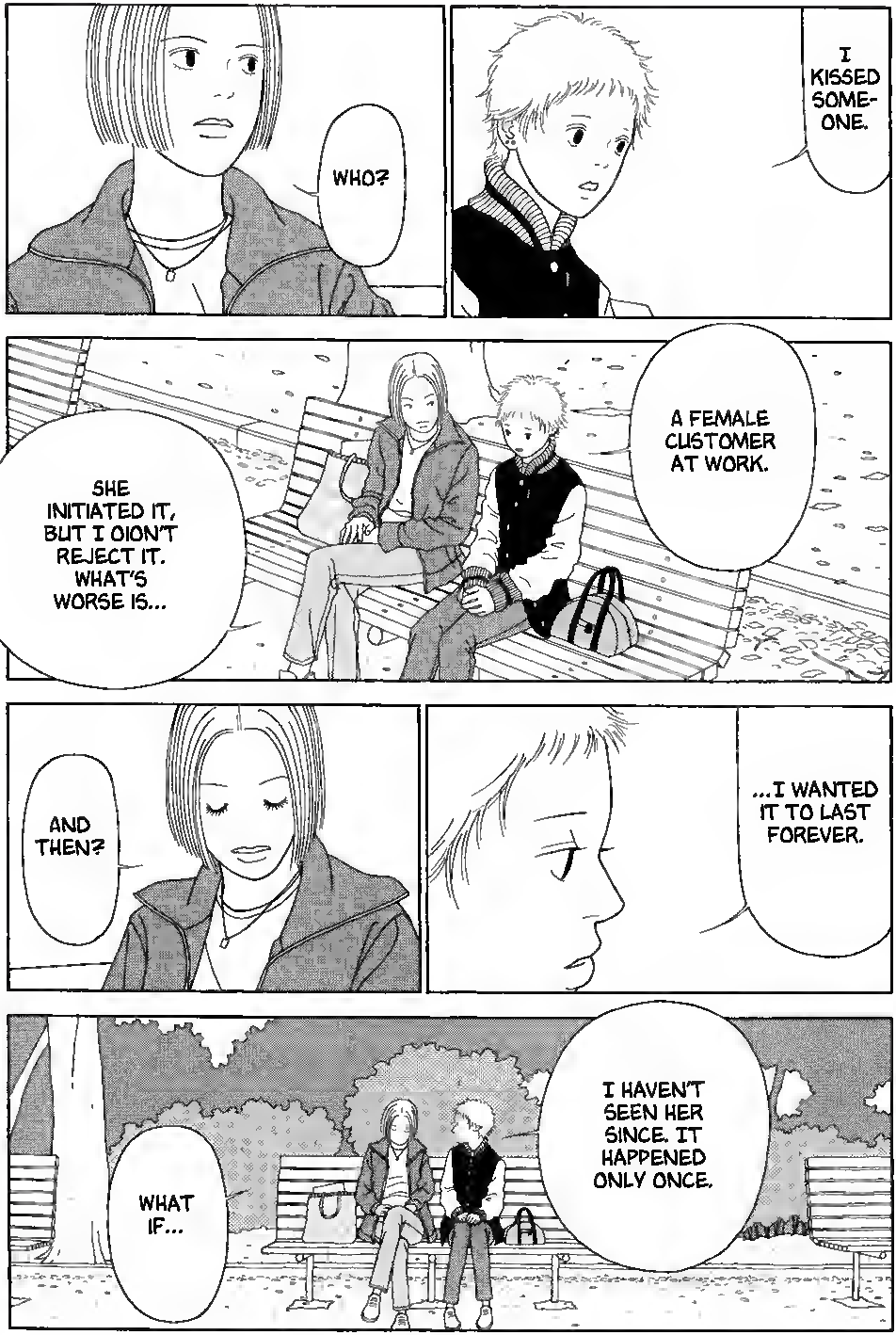

Something crossed my mind when I was at the CD shop.
I have no desire to see her again.

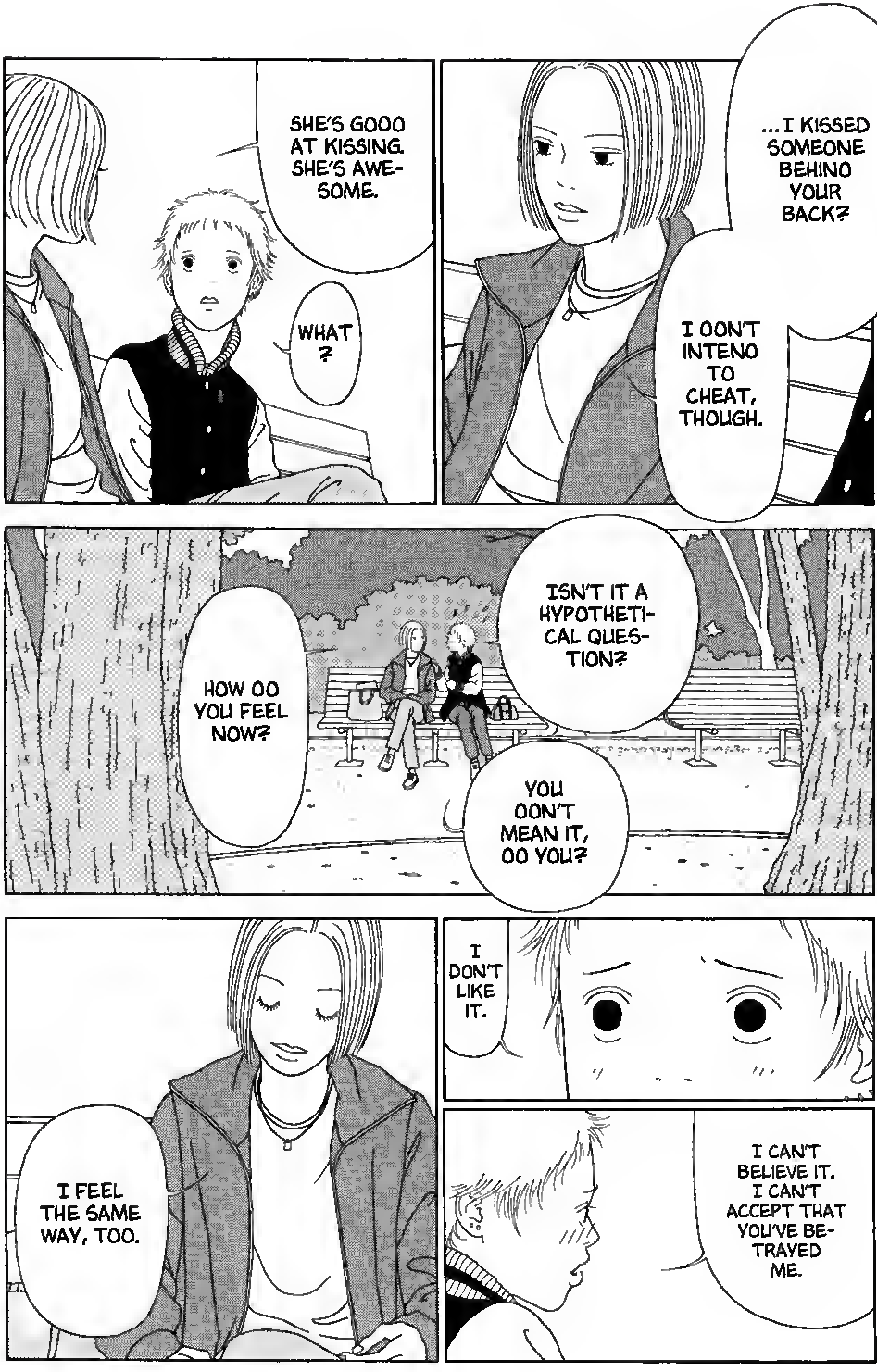

But I wonder what that woman is doing now.

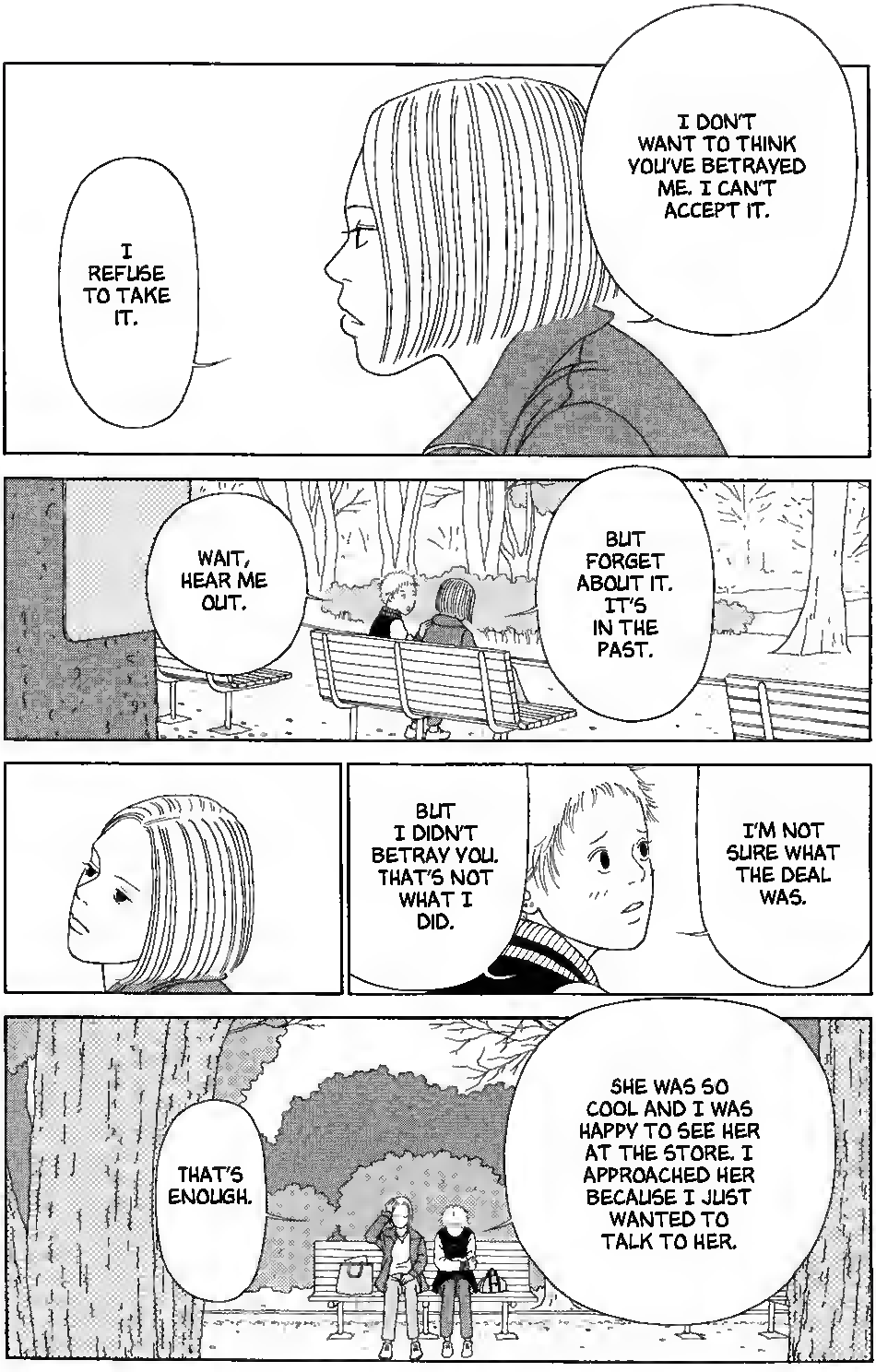
On those occasions,
I grow more anxious
about telling Ellie the
truth, though I keep
putting it on the
back burner.
麻や
ミハナ

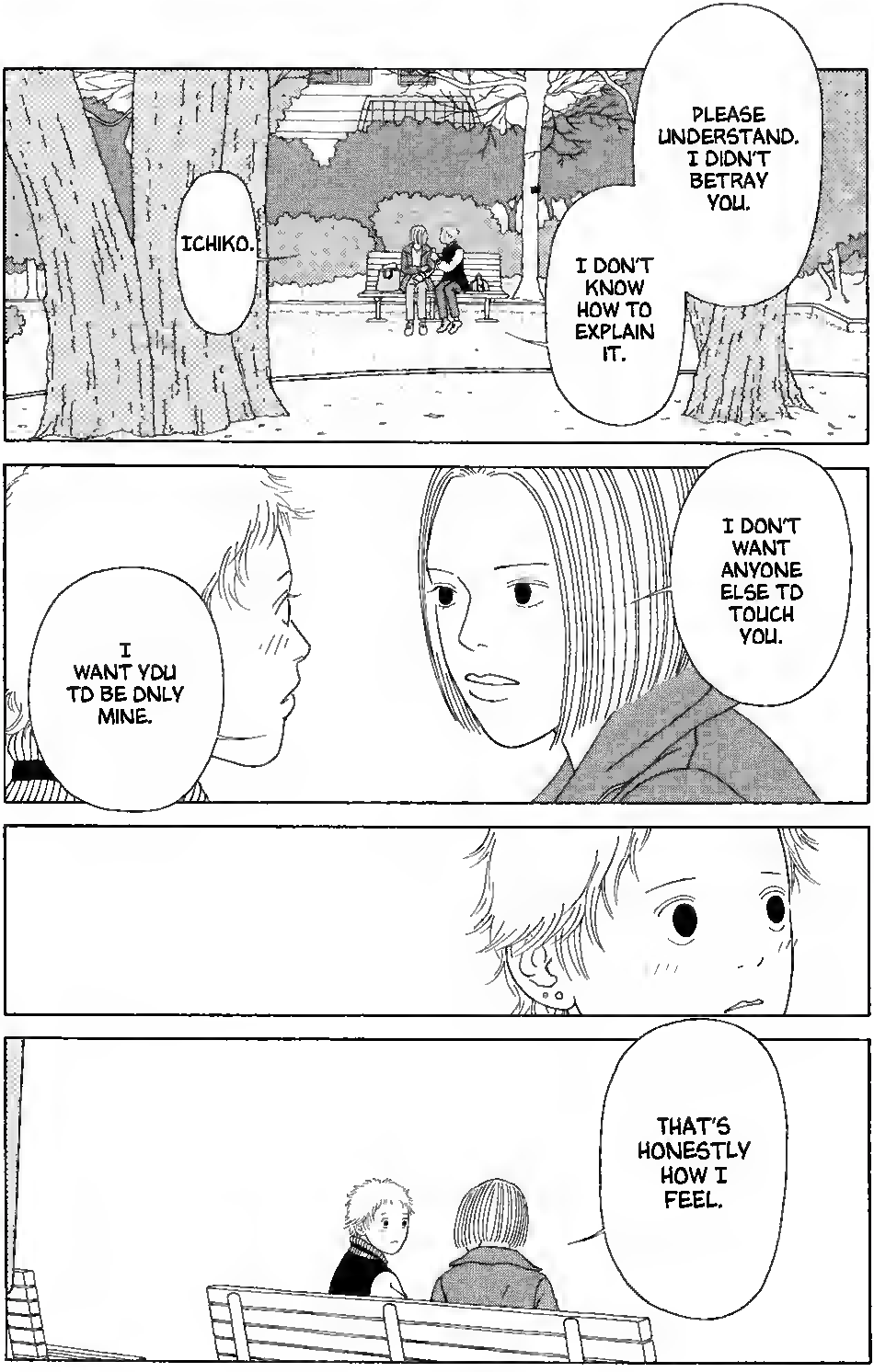

I love Ellie.
I only love her.
I really do.

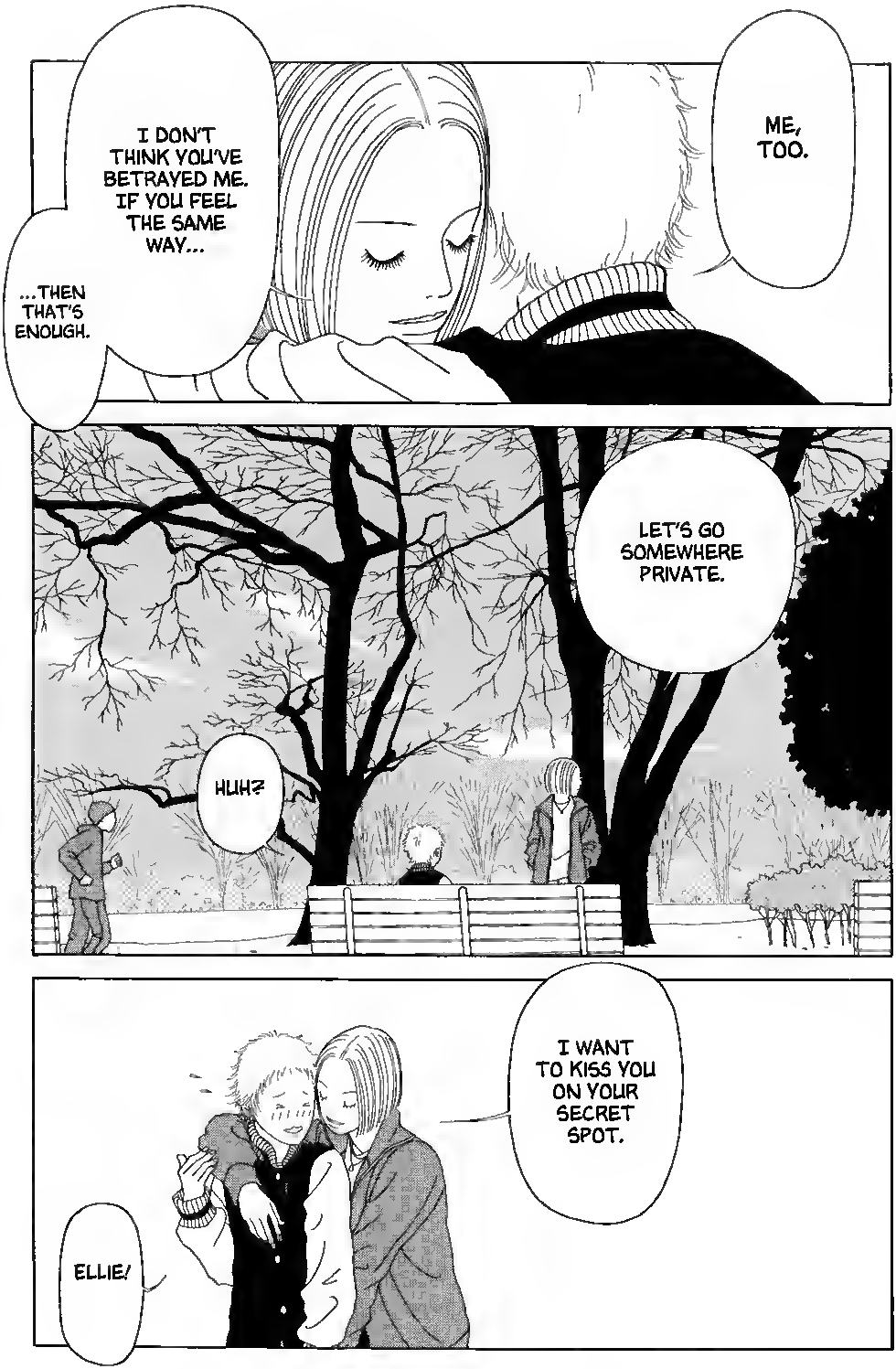
I'M SURE THERE IS.
THERE'S SOMETHING I'VE BEEN HIDING FROM YOU.
I HAVE SOME SECRETS, TOO.
BUT...
YOU DON'T HAVE TO TELL ME.
I WON'T PURSUE IT, EITHER.
REALLY?
I FEEL THE URGE TO TELL YOU ABOUT IT.
OKAY, I'M ALL EARS.

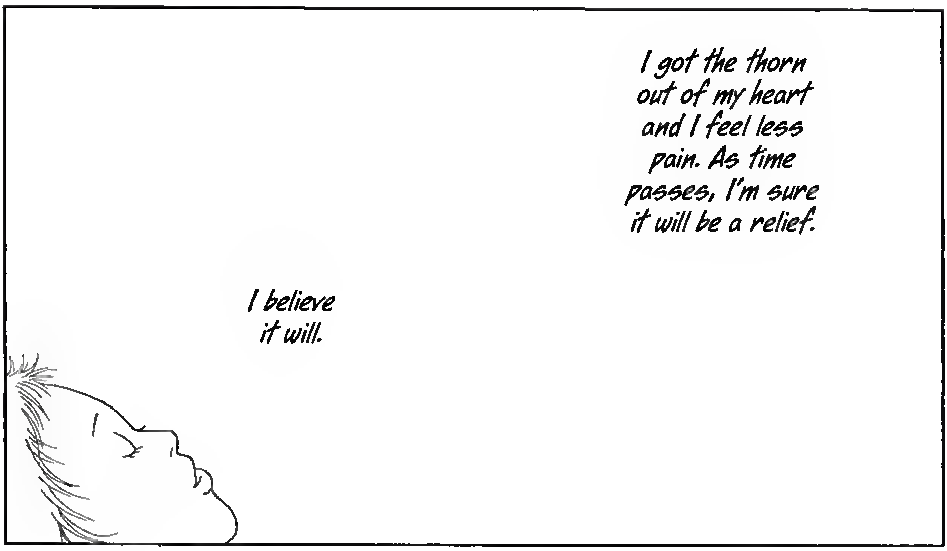

WHO?
I KISSED SOMEONE.
A FEMALE CUSTOMER AT WORK.
SHE INITIATED IT, BUT I DION'T REJECT IT. WHAT'S WORSE IS...
AND THEN?
...I WANTED IT TO LAST FOREVER.
I HAVEN'T SEEN HER SINCE. IT HAPPENED ONLY ONCE.
WHAT IF...


SHE'S GOOD AT KISSING. SHE'S AWESOME.
WHAT?
...I KISSED SOMEONE BEHIND YOUR BACK?
I DON'T INTEND TO CHEAT, THOUGH.
HOW DO YOU FEEL NOW?
ISN'T IT A HYPOTHETICAL QUESTION?
YOU DON'T MEAN IT, DO YOU?
I FEEL THE SAME WAY, TOO.
I DON'T LIKE IT.
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT. I CAN'T ACCEPT THAT YOU'VE BETRAYED ME.

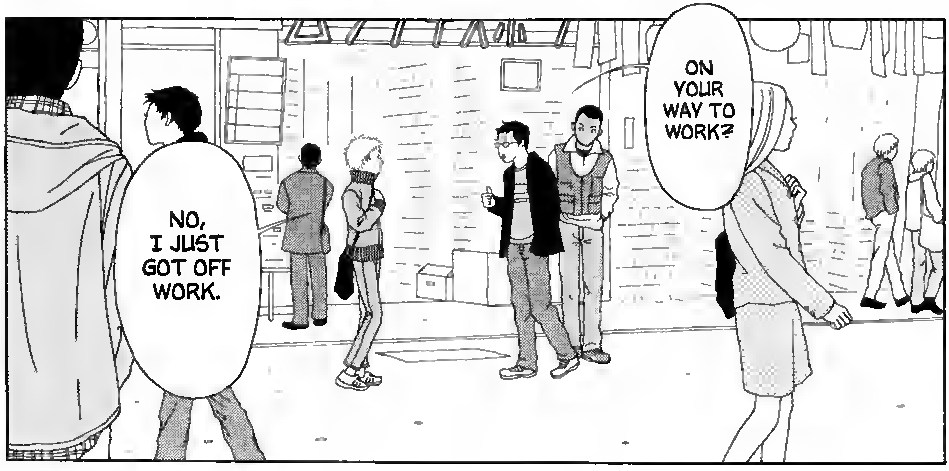

I DON'T WANT TO THINK YOU'VE BETRAYED ME. I CAN'T ACCEPT IT.
I REFUSE TO TAKE IT.
WAIT, HEAR ME OUT.
BUT FORGET ABOUT IT. IT'S IN THE PAST.
BUT I DIDN'T BETRAY YOU. THAT'S NOT WHAT I DID.
I'M NOT SURE WHAT THE DEAL WAS.
SHE WAS SO COOL AND I WAS HAPPY TO SEE HER AT THE STORE. I APPROACHED HER BECAUSE I JUST WANTED TO TALK TO HER.
THAT'S ENOUGH.


ICHIKO.
I DON'T KNOW HOW TO EXPLAIN IT.
PLEASE UNDERSTAND. I DIDN'T BETRAY YOU.
I WANT YOU TO BE ONLY MINE.
I DON'T WANT ANYONE ELSE TO TOUCH YOU.
THAT'S HONESTLY HOW I FEEL.


I DON'T THINK YOU'VE BETRAYED ME. IF YOU FEEL THE SAME WAY...
...THEN THAT'S ENOUGH.
ME, TOO.
LET'S GO SOMEWHERE PRIVATE.
HUH?
I WANT TO KISS YOU ON YOUR SECRET SPOT.
ELLIE!

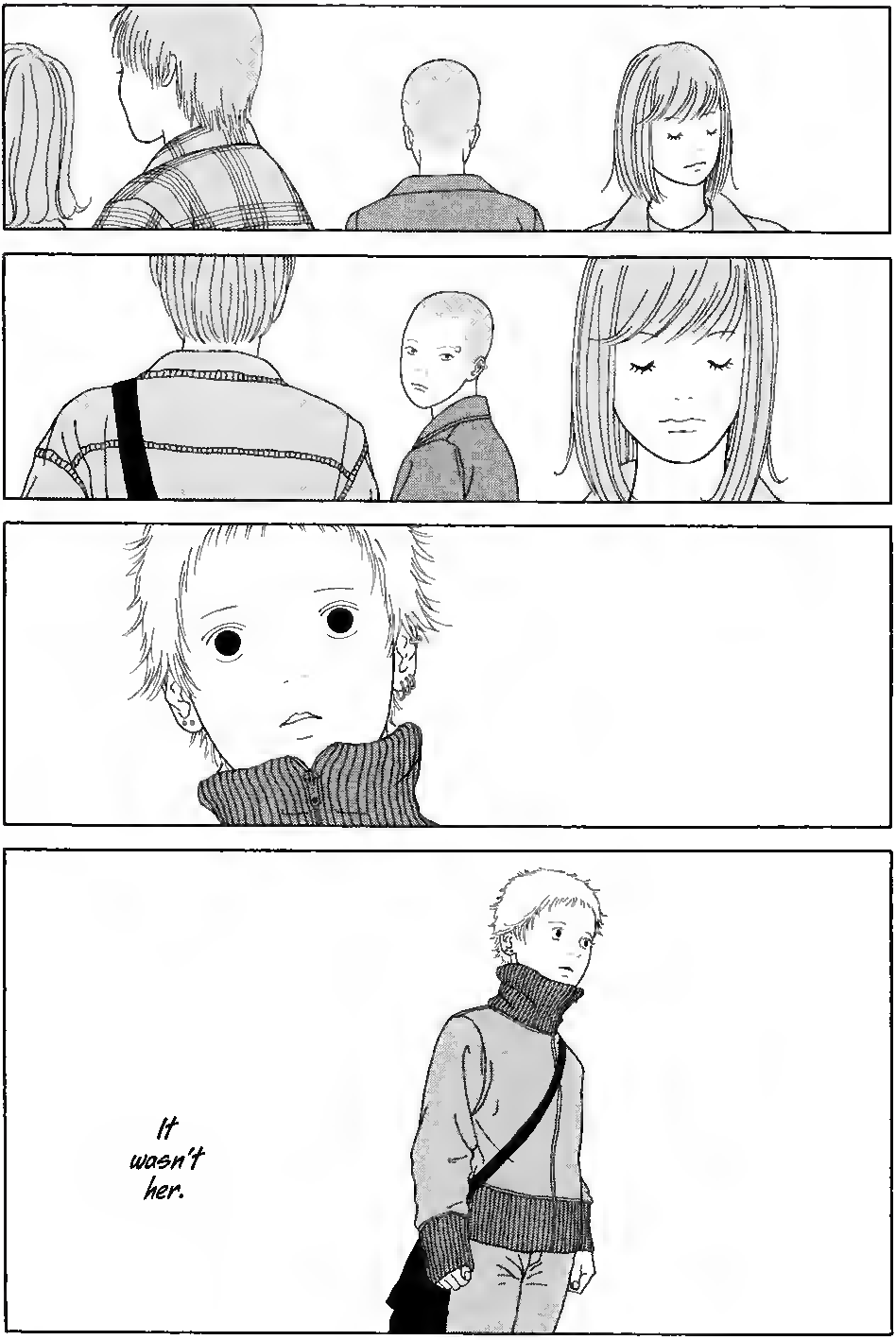

I got the thorn out of my heart and I feel less pain. As time passes, I'm sure it will be a relief.
I believe it will.

TAKE-CHAN!
AH!
IS THAT YOU, ICHIKO?


NO, I JUST GOT OFF WORK.
ON YOUR WAY TO WORK?

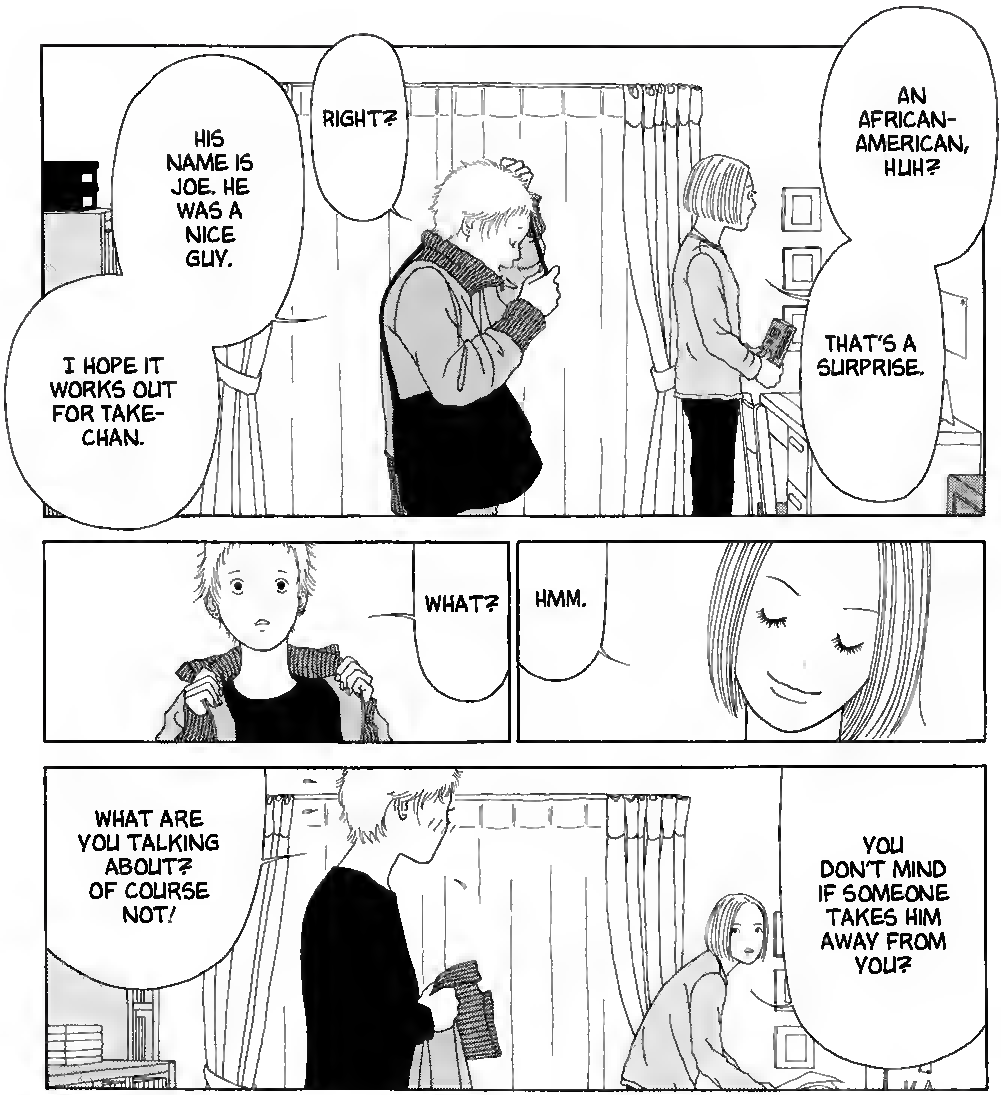
She's my best friend, Ichiko.
Take ...
...Who's this?
Nice to meet you, Joe.
Nice to meet you, Ichiko
!?
My name is Joe.
She's tiny! How old is she?
She's Take's best friend?
REALLY ?!
whisper
HE'S MY BRAND NEW BOY-FRIEND.
We better hurry or we'll be late!
Sorry, Take.
THANKS, ICHIKO I'm so happy!
yay!
THAT'S GREAT. CON-GRATS!

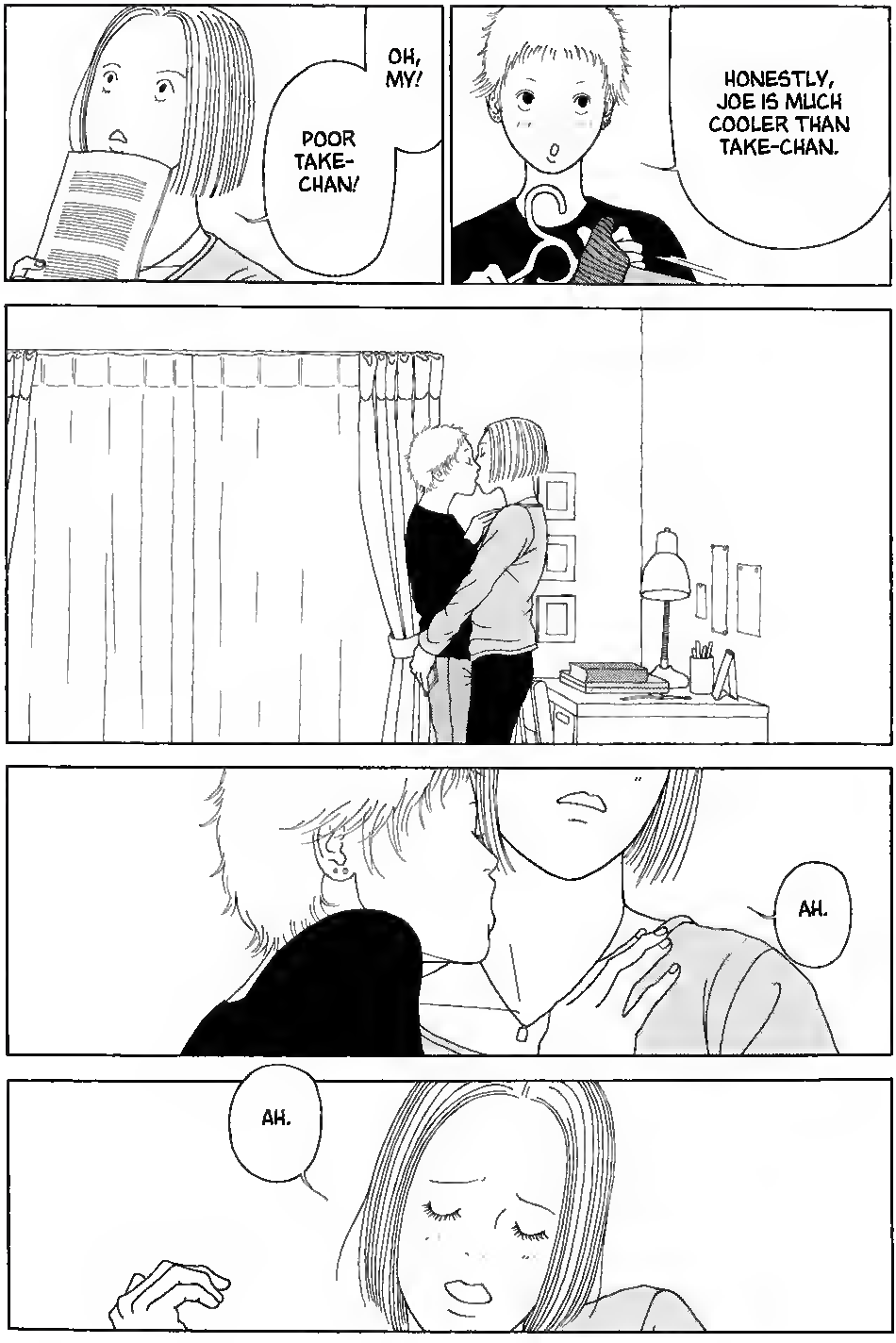
Have a nice day!
See ya, Ichiko!
I'LL CALL YOU SOON.
X-LARGE
But to other people, I bet they just look like friends.
It's the first time I saw him with a boyfriend.
I WONDER HOW THEY MET?
WOW, THAT WAS A SURPRISE.
Huh?


It wasn't her.

I'm glad...

...it was the wrong person.

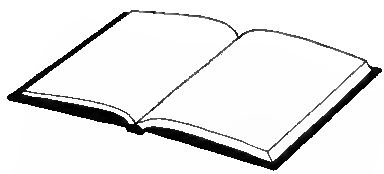

AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN, HUH?
RIGHT?
HIS NAME IS JOE. HE WAS A NICE GUY.
I HOPE IT WORKS OUT FOR TAKE-CHAN.
THAT'S A SURPRISE.
WHAT?
HMM.
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? OF COURSE NOT!
YOU DON'T MIND IF SOMEONE TAKES HIM AWAY FROM YOU?


OH, MY!
POOR TAKE-CHAN!
HONESTLY, JOE IS MUCH COOLER THAN TAKE-CHAN.
AH.
AH.

That woman with the shaved head...

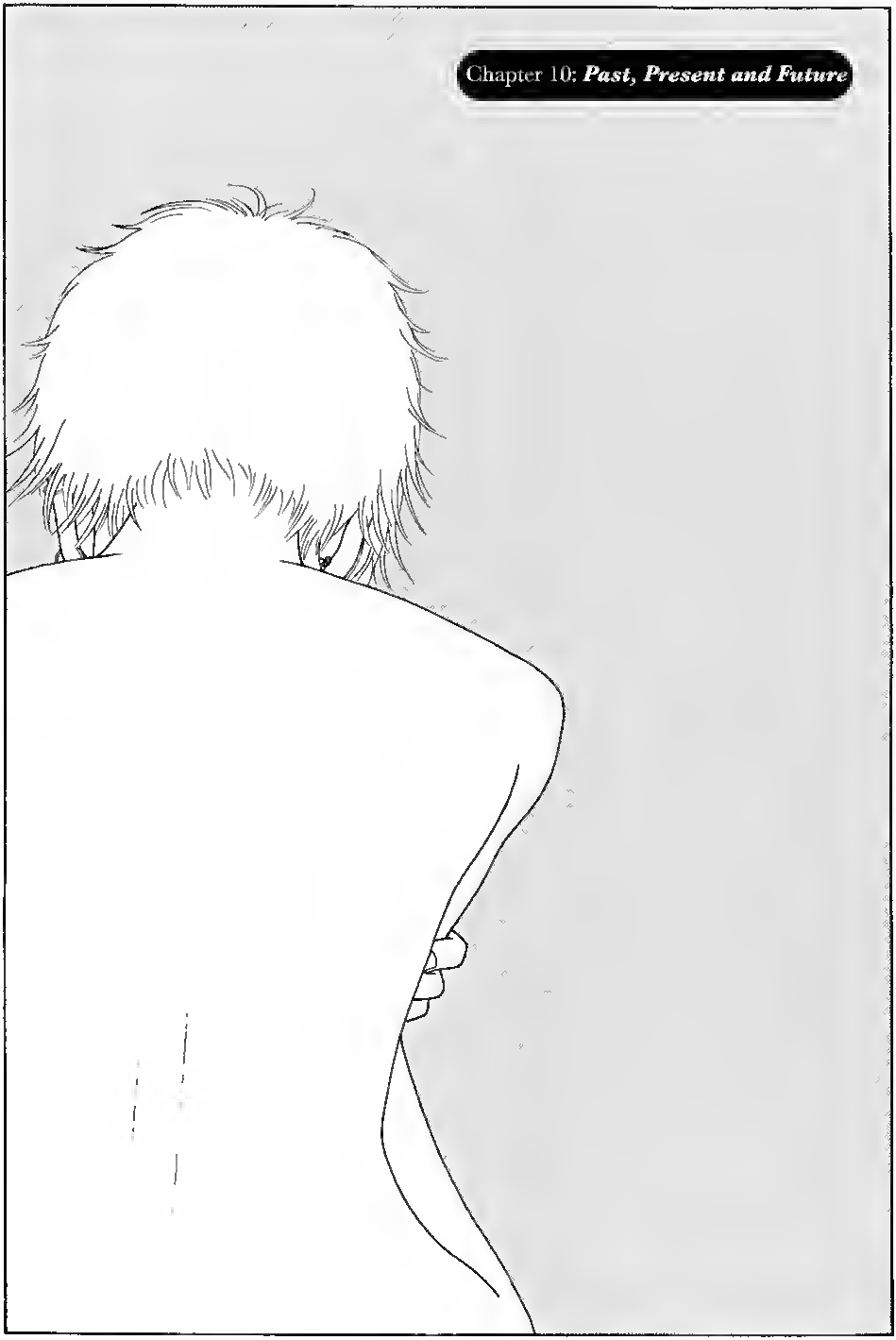
...Appeared in my dream.

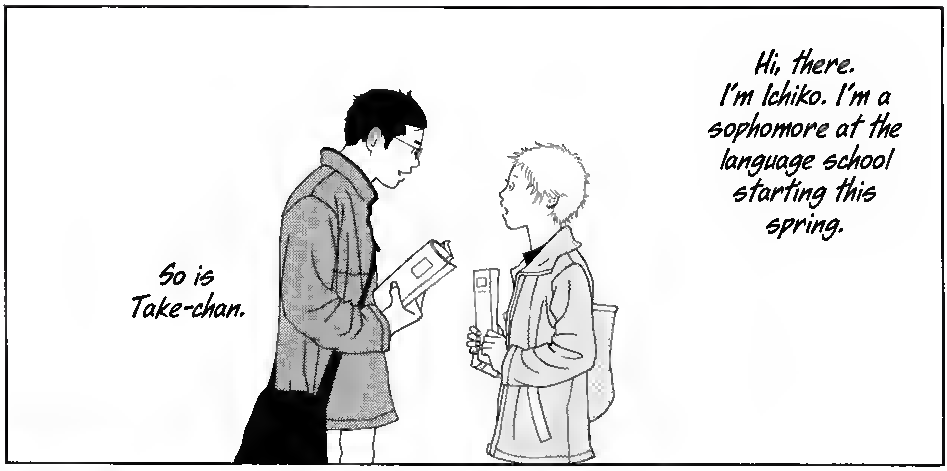
I read in a book that seeing my ex in a dream means I got over her.

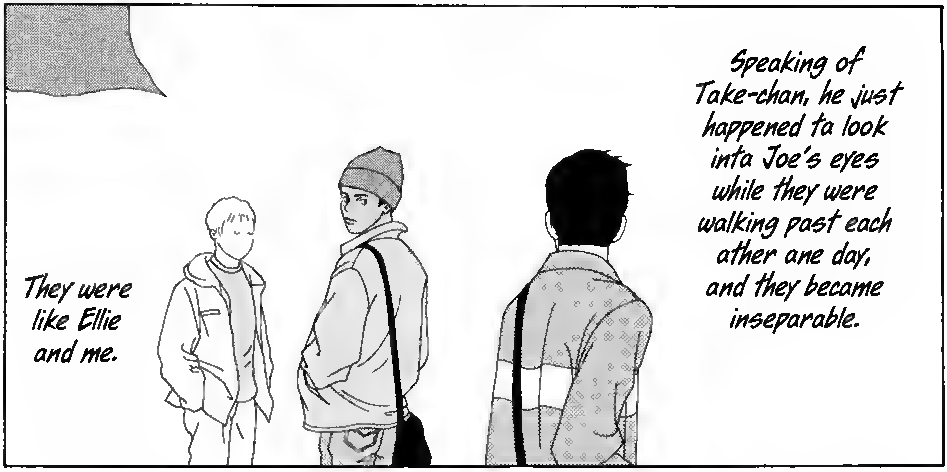


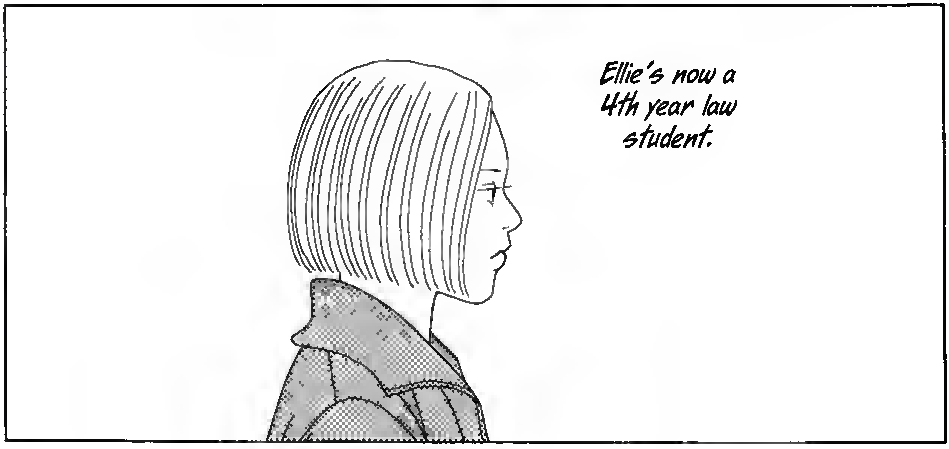
...or in my memory.

She wasn't my girlfriend, but I won't look for her at the CD shop, in the crowd...


Chapter 10: *Past, Present and Future*


Hi, there. I'm Ichiko. I'm a sophomore at the language school starting this spring.
So is Take-chan.

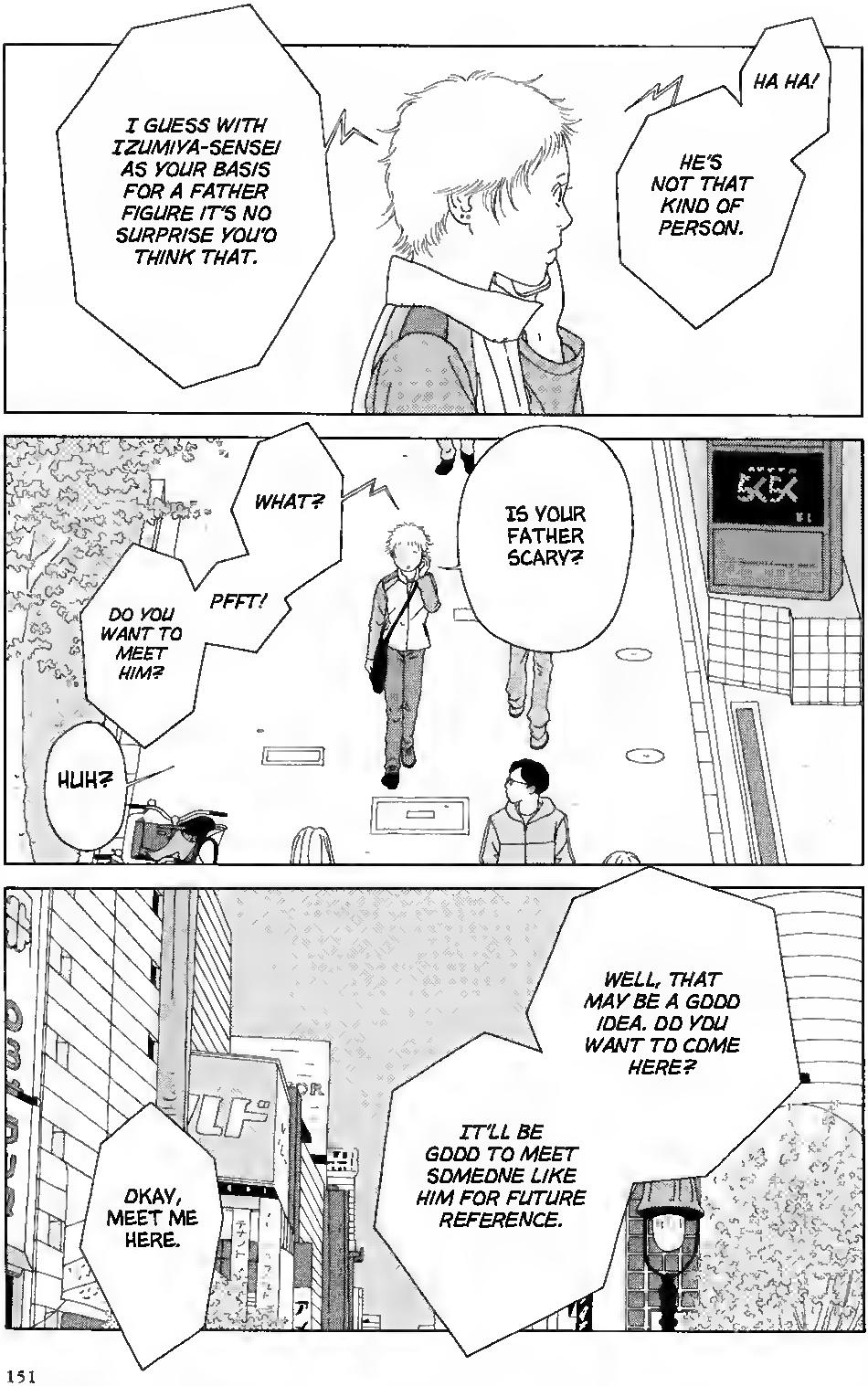

Speaking of Take-chan, he just happened ta look inta Joe's eyes while they were walking past each ather ane day, and they became inseparable.
They were like Ellie and me.


Ellie's now a 4th year law student.

We still see each other, but I can feel the fear inside me. Maybe today is the day she'll tell me she can't see me anymore.
ぼんち亭
居酒屋

I want to grow up. I know I have to, but so soon?
Will I feel better if I grow up so quickly?

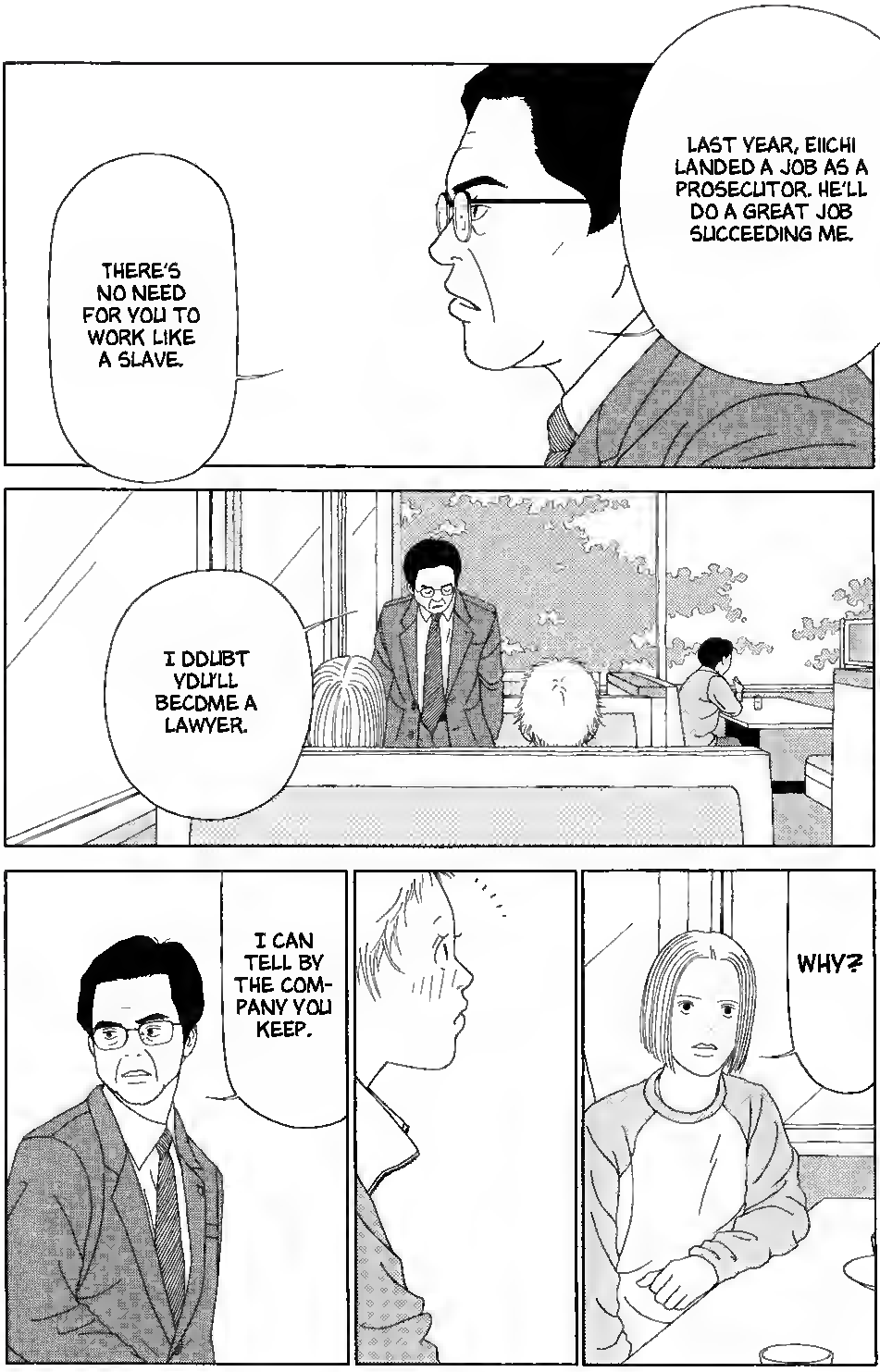
ring ring ring
HELLO?
HI, ELLIE! WHAT'S UP?
WHERE ARE YOU NOW?
ALMOST AT THE MOVIE THEATER.
I'M SORRY. I JUST FOUND OUT THAT I HAVE TO GO SEE MY FATHER.
WHAT?
OH, I'M SORRY. CAN YOU HANG AROUND SOMEWHERE?
MODE
YOU HAVEN'T SEEN HIM IN A WHILE. DON'T YOU HAVE A LOT TO TALK ABOUT?
YOU LIVE CLOSE TO YOUR PARENTS, BUT YOU HAVEN'T VISITED THEM.
I THINK I'LL BE DONE IN HALF AN HOUR.
BUT ELLIE...


I GUESS WITH IZUMIYA-SENSEI AS YOUR BASIS FOR A FATHER FIGURE IT'S NO SURPRISE YOU'D THINK THAT.
HA HA!
HE'S NOT THAT KIND OF PERSON.
WHAT?
PFFT!
DO YOU WANT TO MEET HIM?
HUH?
IS YOUR FATHER SCARY?
WELL, THAT MAY BE A GOOD IDEA. DO YOU WANT TO COME HERE?
IT'LL BE GOOD TO MEET SOMEONE LIKE HIM FOR FUTURE REFERENCE.
OKAY, MEET ME HERE.

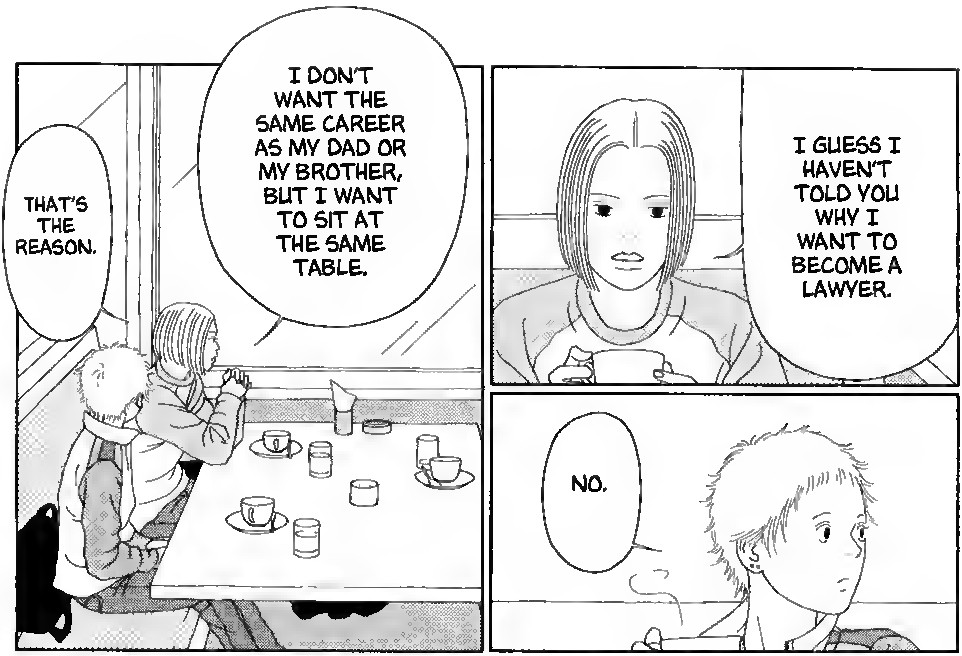
When I got there, Ellie and her father were about to start a conversation.

SIT DOWN. IT'LL BE OVER RIGHT AWAY.
I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THIS NONSENSE. HAVE A SEAT.
NICE TO MEET YOU. I'M ICHIKO. ERIKO-SAN AND I—
THAT'S OKAY.
YOU'RE TAKING THE BAR NEXT YEAR?
IT'S GOING WELL.
HOW'S YOUR EXAM PREPARA-TION GOING?
YES, NEXT YEAR.

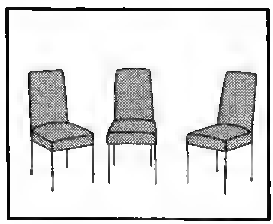
YOU CAN BE SURE I'LL GRADU-ATE. MY THESIS IS PERFECT.
WILL YOU BE ABLE TO GRADUATE? WHAT ABOUT THE THESIS?
LISTEN, YOU CAN'T FLUNK THE BAR. IT'S YOUR CHOICE TO RETAKE IT, BUT I'LL CUT OFF YOUR ALLOW-ANCE.
ANYONE WHO FLUNKS THE FIRST EXAM IS WORTHLESS.
EIICHI ANO I BOTH PASSED ALL EXAMS IN ONE SHOT.
ANO YOU'RE A WOMAN.
YOU DON'T NEED TO BECOME A LAWYER.


LAST YEAR, EIICHI LANDED A JOB AS A PROSECUTOR. HE'LL DO A GREAT JOB SUCCEEDING ME.
THERE'S NO NEED FOR YOU TO WORK LIKE A SLAVE.
I DOUBT YOU'LL BECOME A LAWYER.
I CAN TELL BY THE COMPANY YOU KEEP.
WHY?

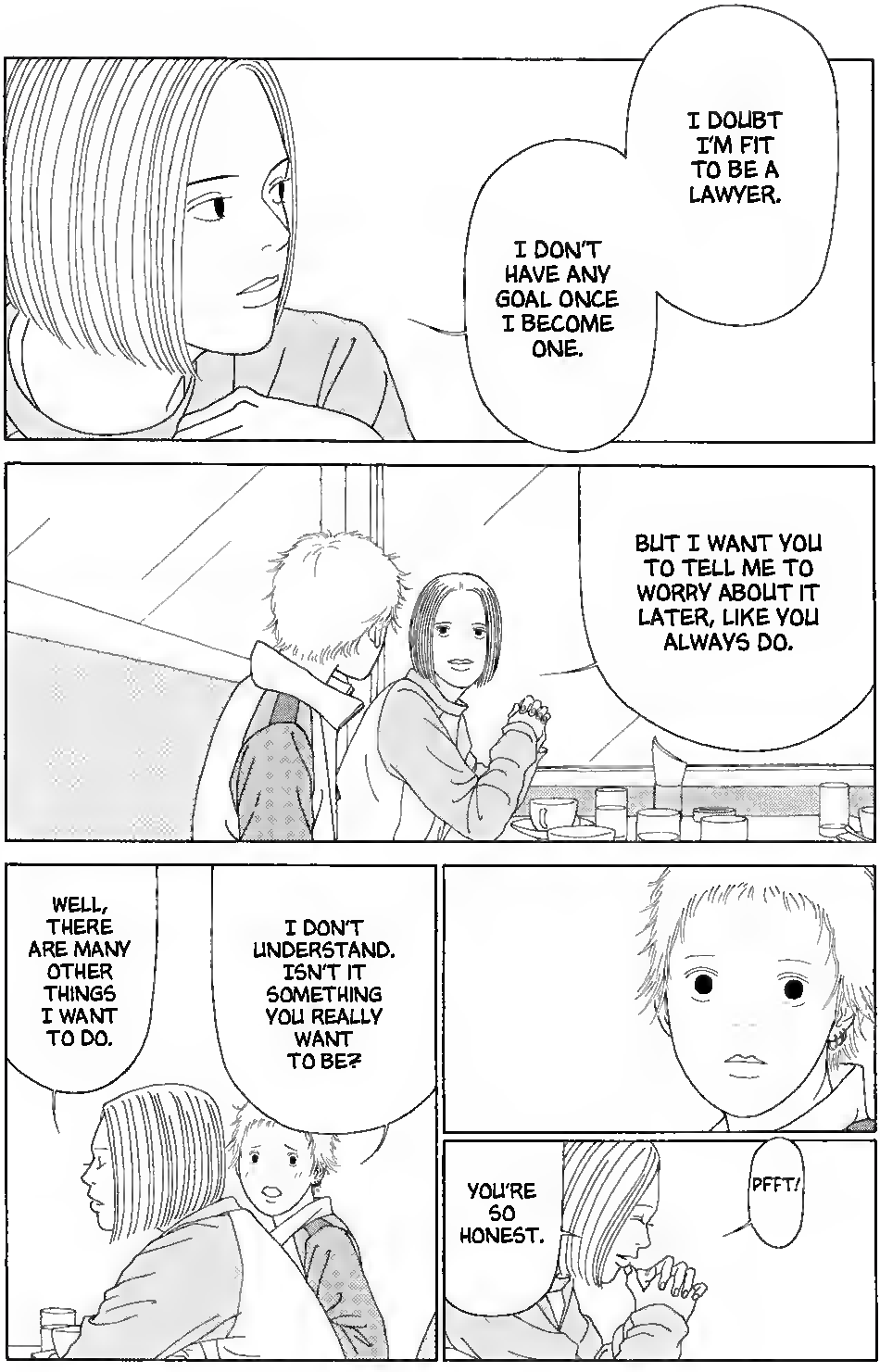
Ellie and her dad's meeting really ended in half an hour.

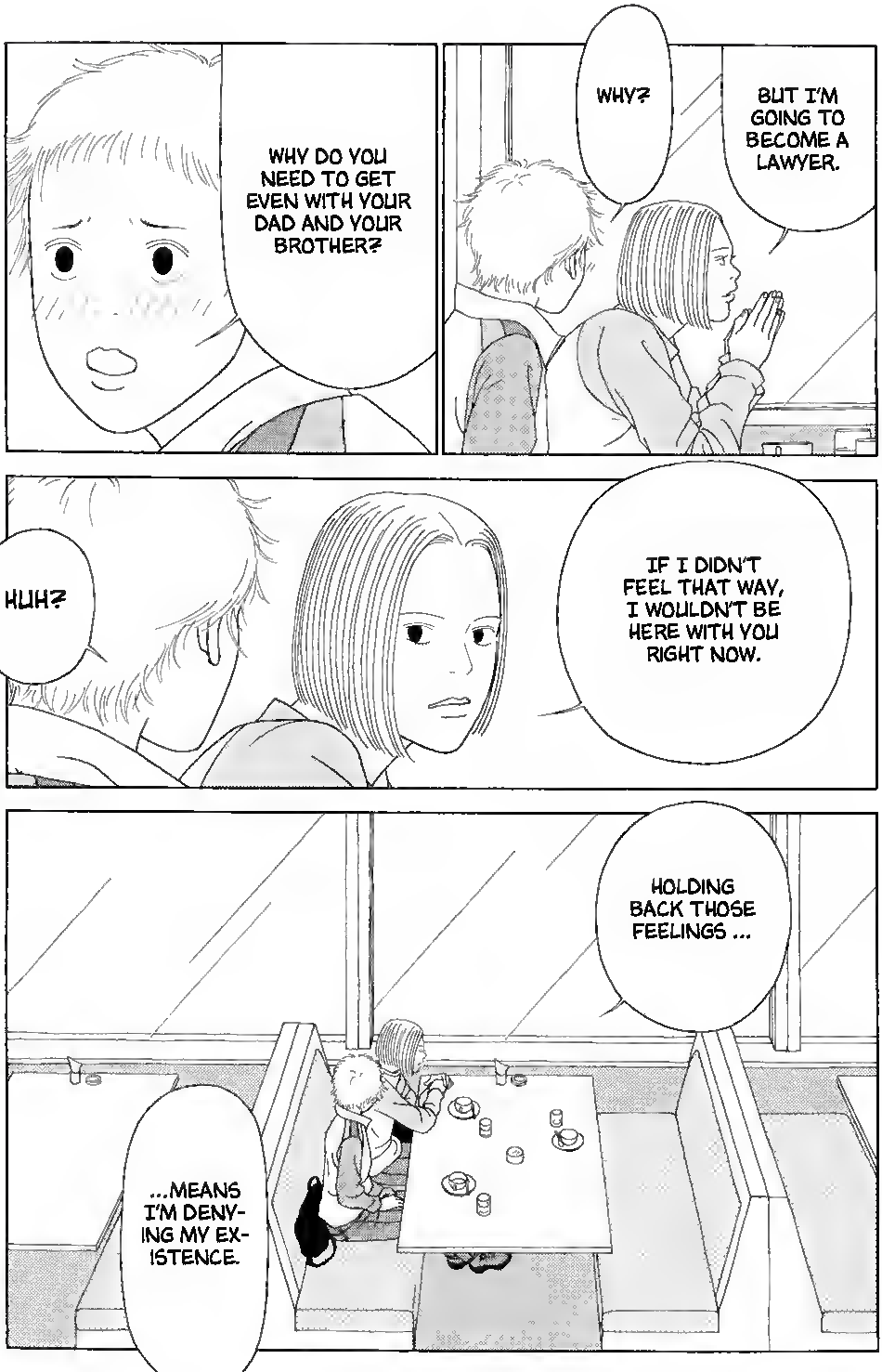

I DON'T WANT THE SAME CAREER AS MY DAD OR MY BROTHER, BUT I WANT TO SIT AT THE SAME TABLE.
THAT'S THE REASON.
I GUESS I HAVEN'T TOLD YOU WHY I WANT TO BECOME A LAWYER.
NO.

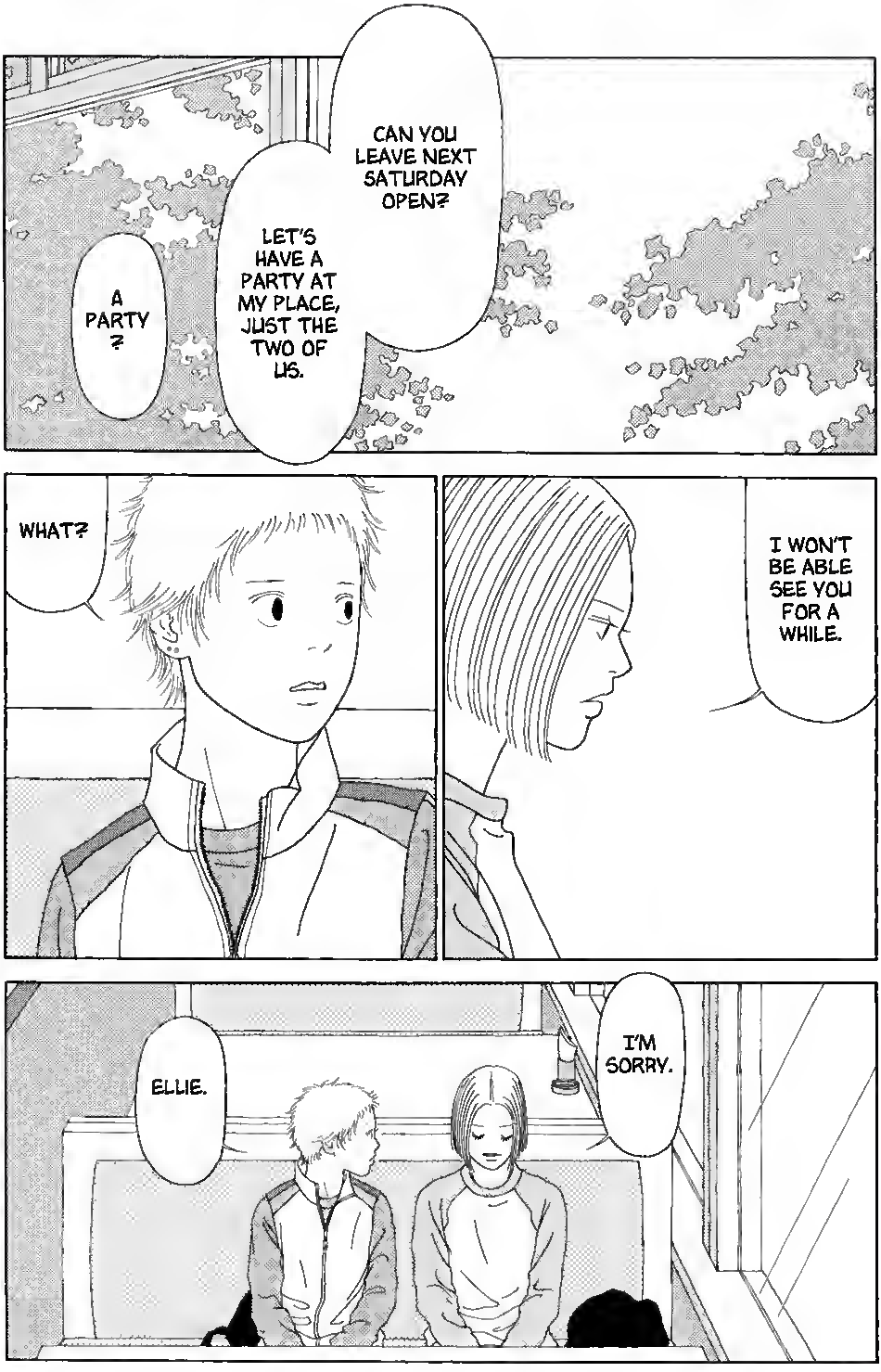
And be on equal footing with you.

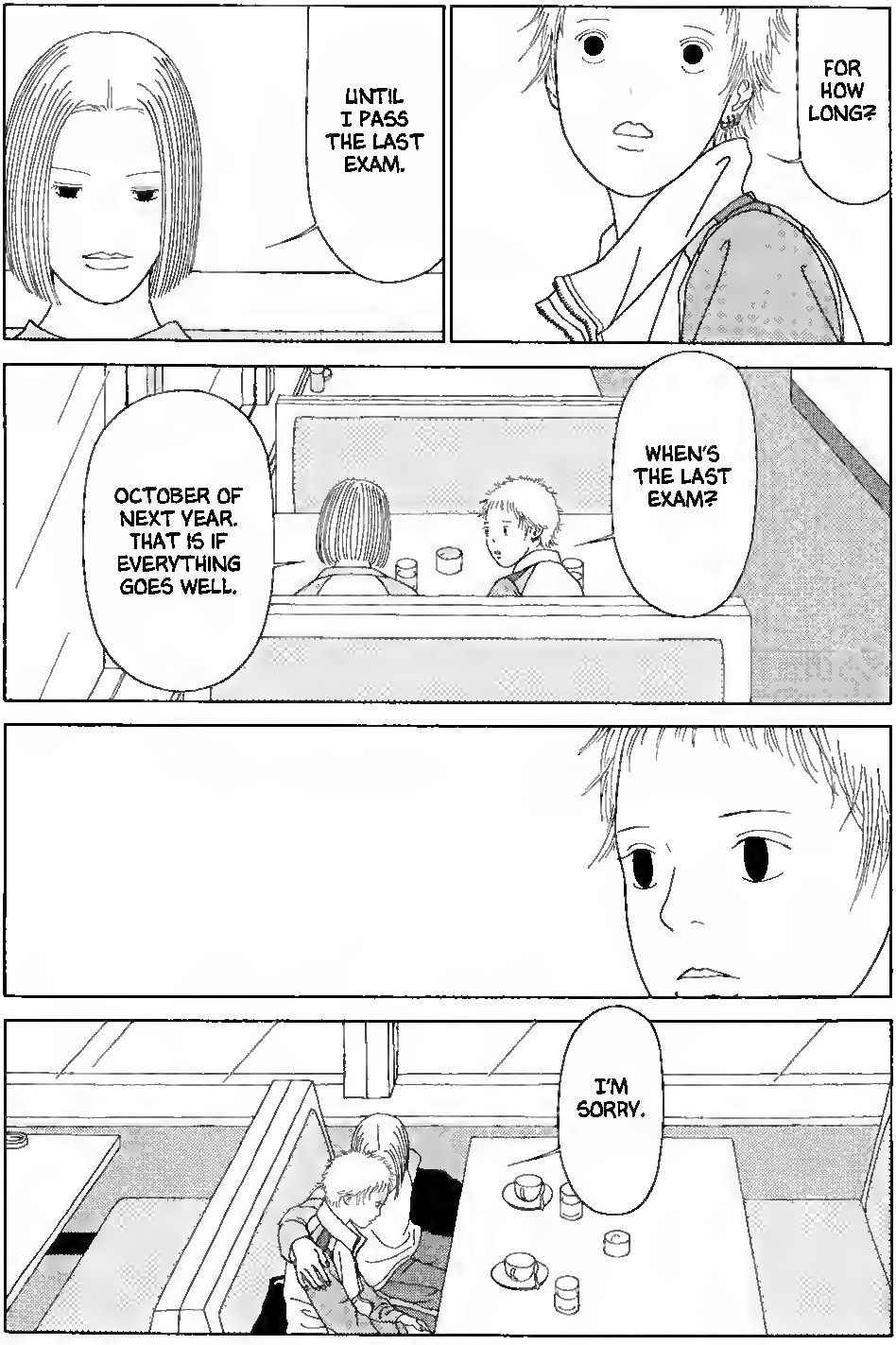


I can catch up to you.

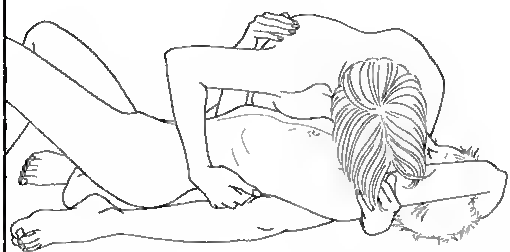

I DOUBT I'M FIT TO BE A LAWYER.
I DON'T HAVE ANY GOAL ONCE I BECOME ONE.
BUT I WANT YOU TO TELL ME TO WORRY ABOUT IT LATER, LIKE YOU ALWAYS DO.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND. ISN'T IT SOMETHING YOU REALLY WANT TO BE?
WELL, THERE ARE MANY OTHER THINGS I WANT TO DO.
PFFT!
YOU'RE SO HONEST.


WHY DO YOU NEED TO GET EVEN WITH YOUR DAD AND YOUR BROTHER?
WHY?
BUT I'M GOING TO BECOME A LAWYER.
HUH?
IF I DIDN'T FEEL THAT WAY, I WOULDN'T BE HERE WITH YOU RIGHT NOW.
HOLDING BACK THOSE FEELINGS ...
...MEANS I'M DENYING MY EXISTENCE.

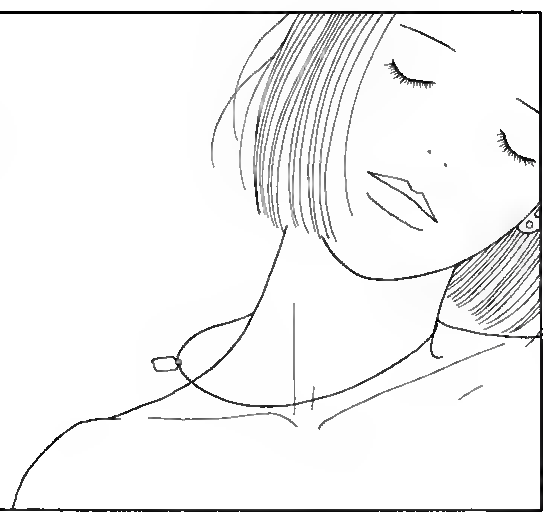

A PARTY ?
LET'S HAVE A PARTY AT MY PLACE, JUST THE TWO OF US.
CAN YOU LEAVE NEXT SATURDAY OPEN?
WHAT?
I WON'T BE ABLE SEE YOU FOR A WHILE.
ELLIE.
I'M SORRY.


UNTIL I PASS THE LAST EXAM.
FOR HOW LONG?
OCTOBER OF NEXT YEAR. THAT IS IF EVERYTHING GOES WELL.
WHEN'S THE LAST EXAM?
I'M SORRY.

That Saturday
came too quickly.
We could only strip
naked and touch
each other.

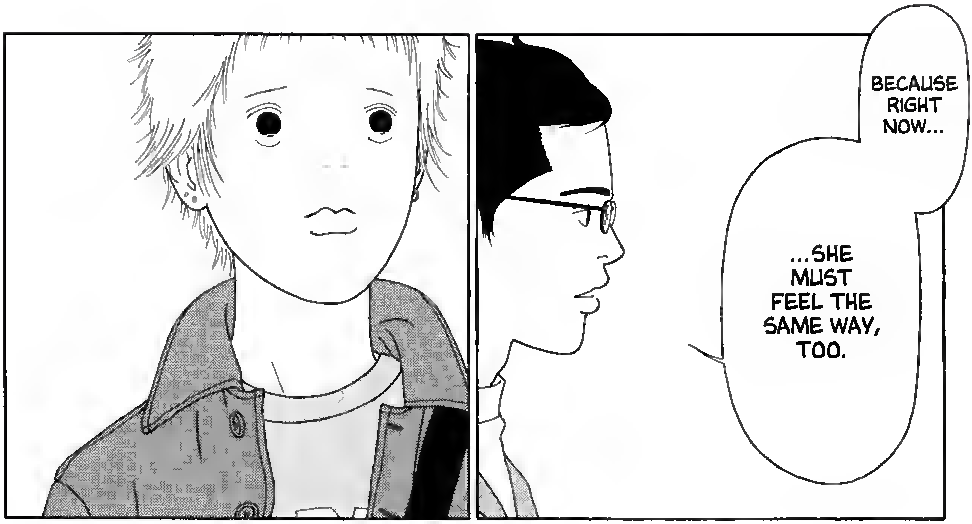


The smell
and touch of
her skin....



...disappeared into thin air after that.

CHEER UP, ICHIKO!
COME ON, I'M FINE, TAKE-CHAN.
I REALLY AM.
ICHIKO.
ELLIE HASN'T BECOME ESTRANGED. SHE'S RIGHT THERE BY YOUR SIDE.
DO YOU WANT TO GO DANCING WITH JOE AND ME? OR GO OUT TO EAT?
DON'T LET ME GET IN YOUR WAY.
THAT'S OKAY!

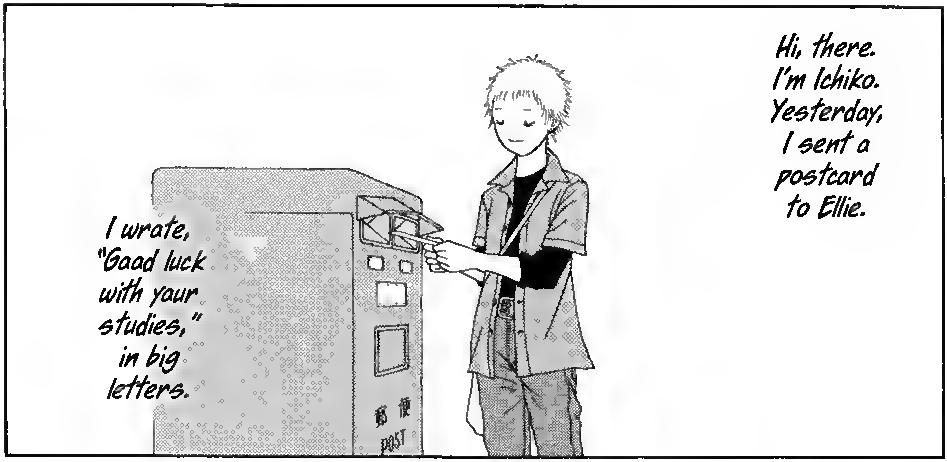


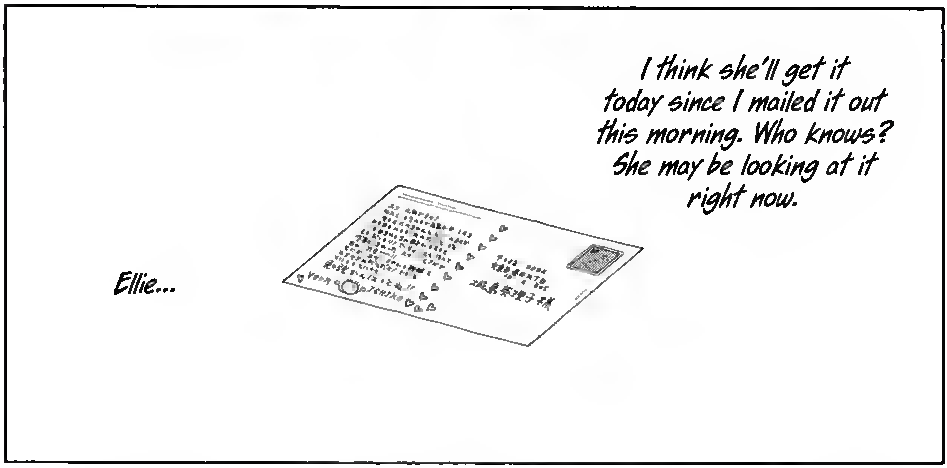
Ellie.

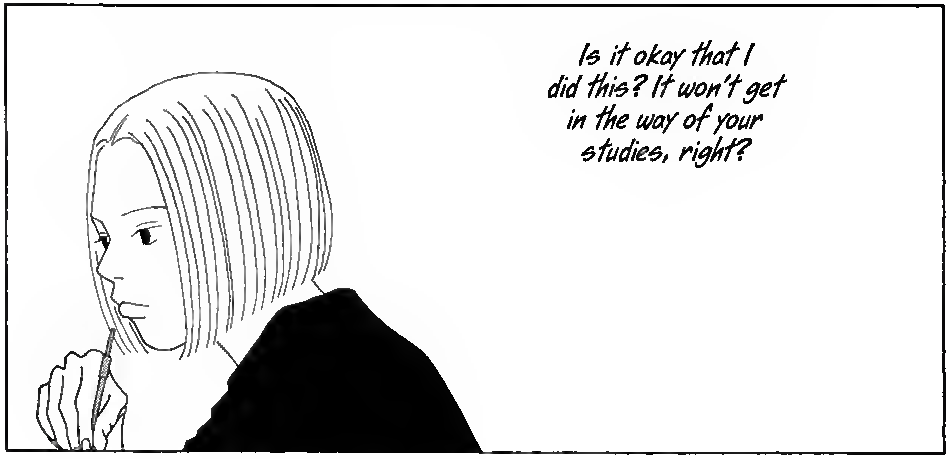
I'll get used to this. It's not like we said good-bye. I can always go find you at your apartment. You'll answer my phone call. You're there by my side.

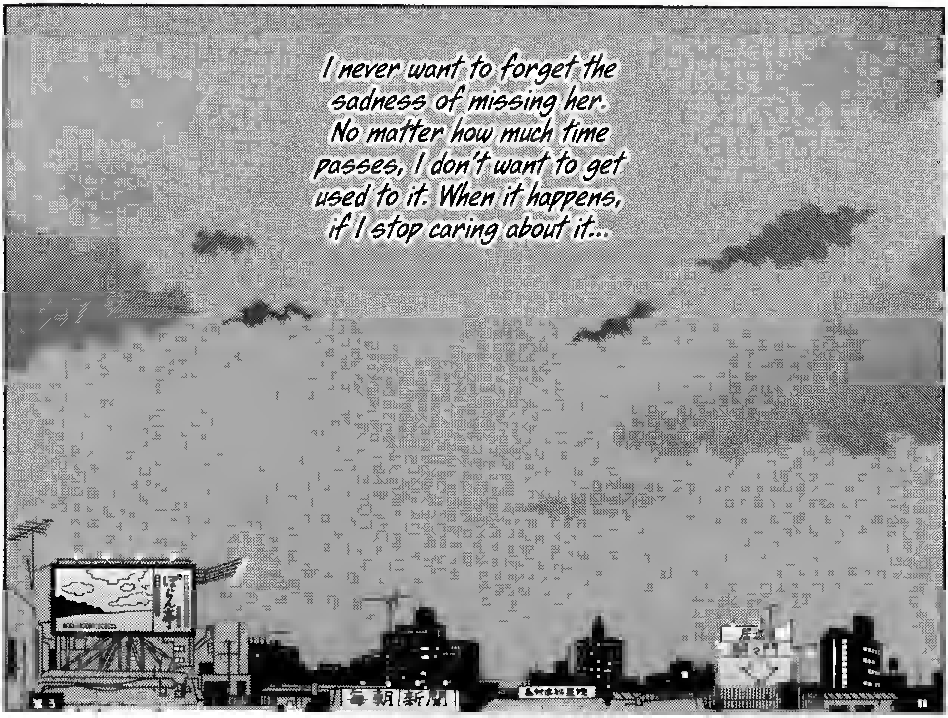
This all just keeps running through my mind, over and over.

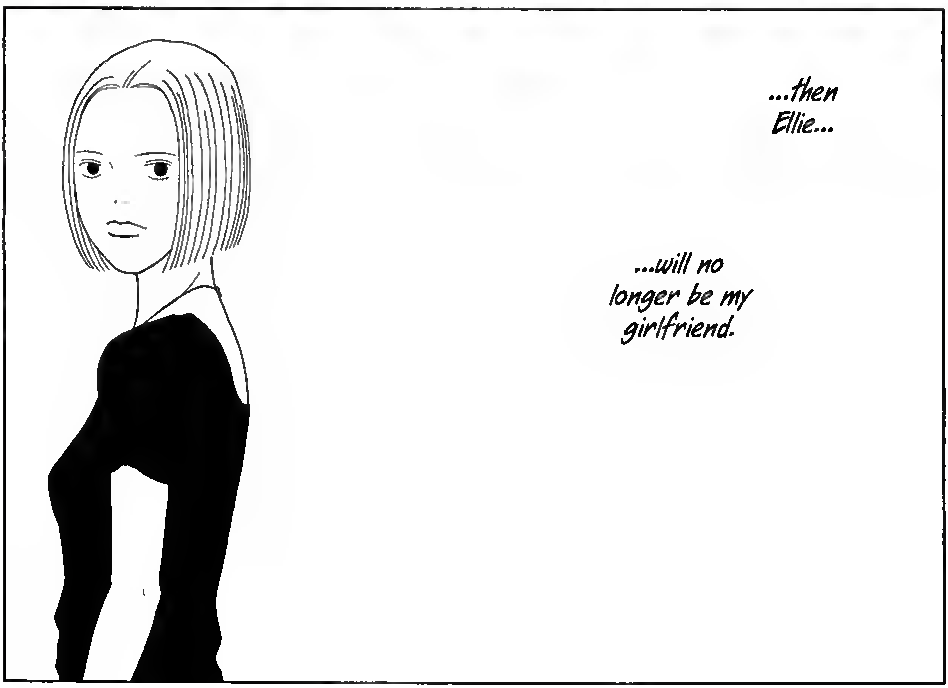
Chapter 11: *Miss You*


Hi, there. I'm Ichiko. Yesterday, I sent a postcard to Ellie.
I wrote, "Good luck with your studies," in big letters.
POST

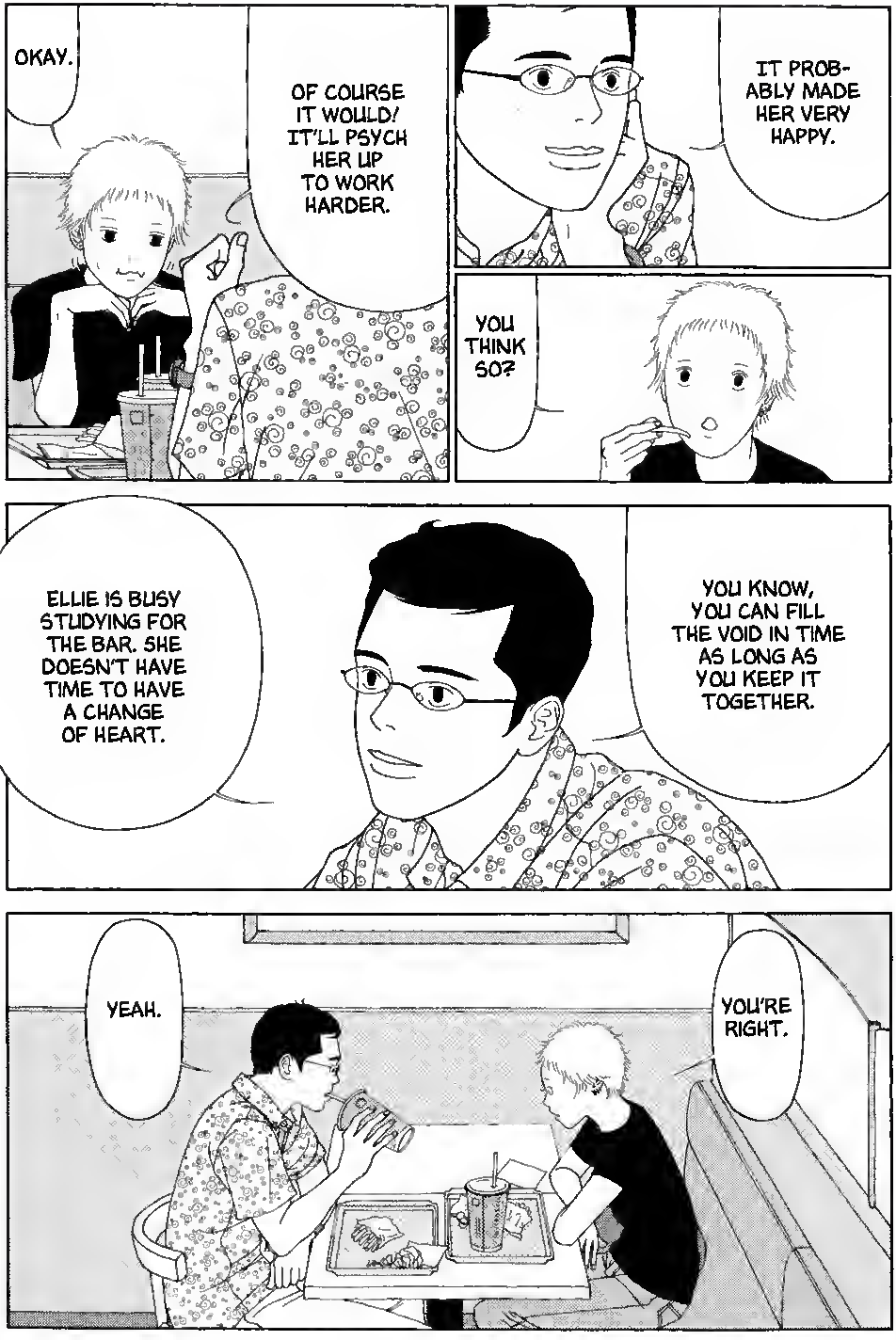

I think she'll get it today since I mailed it out this morning. Who knows? She may be looking at it right now.
Ellie...


Is it okay that I did this? It won't get in the way of your studies, right?

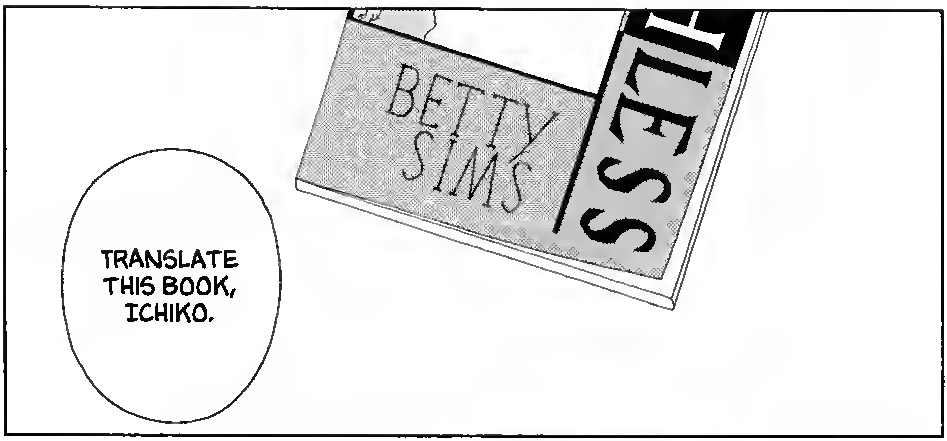

I never want to forget the sadness of missing her. No matter how much time passes, I don't want to get used to it. When it happens, if I stop caring about it...

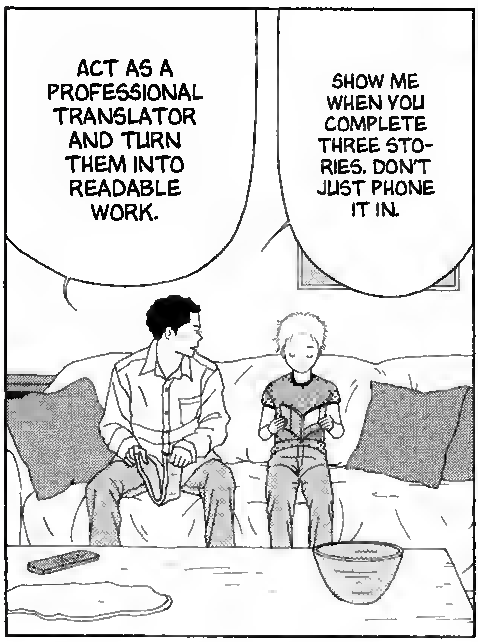

...then Ellie...
...will no longer be my girlfriend.

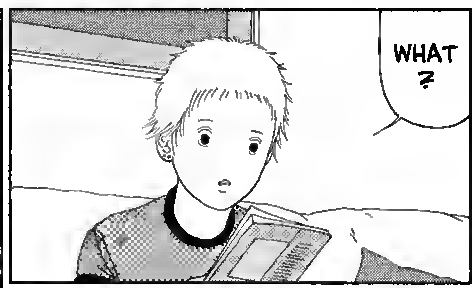
I LIKE POST-CARDS. THERE'S A FEELING OF WARMTH IN A HANDWRITTEN LETTER.
I CAN REALLY APPRECIATE THAT PERSON'S TASTE IN PIC-TURES AND PHOTOS.
ACTU-ALLY...
...I WISH I COULD TEXT HER AND DO WHATEVER IT TOOK TO GET A REPLY FROM HER.
I SENT HER A POSTCARD WITH AN IMAGE OF TWO WHITE PILLOWS. THERE'S A TRAILING ROSE...
...WRAPPED AROUND THEM.
WOW, SO SEXY!
WHAT? IT ISN'T SEXY. IT'S A VERY CLASSY PICTURE.
COME ON, WHAT WERE YOU IMAGIN-ING?
HUH?
NOTHING.
La Nuit
© Kathryn Kleinman

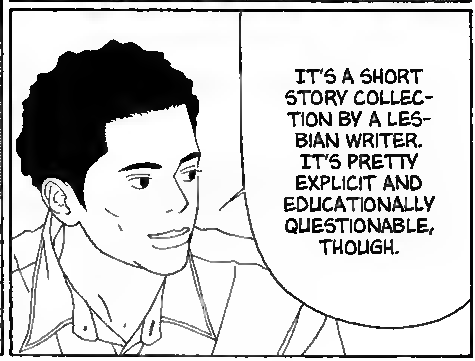

OKAY.
OF COURSE IT WOULD! IT'LL PSYCH HER UP TO WORK HARDER.
IT PROBABLY MADE HER VERY HAPPY.
YOU THINK SO?
ELLIE IS BUSY STUDYING FOR THE BAR. SHE DOESN'T HAVE TIME TO HAVE A CHANGE OF HEART.
YOU KNOW, YOU CAN FILL THE VOID IN TIME AS LONG AS YOU KEEP IT TOGETHER.
YEAH.
YOU'RE RIGHT.

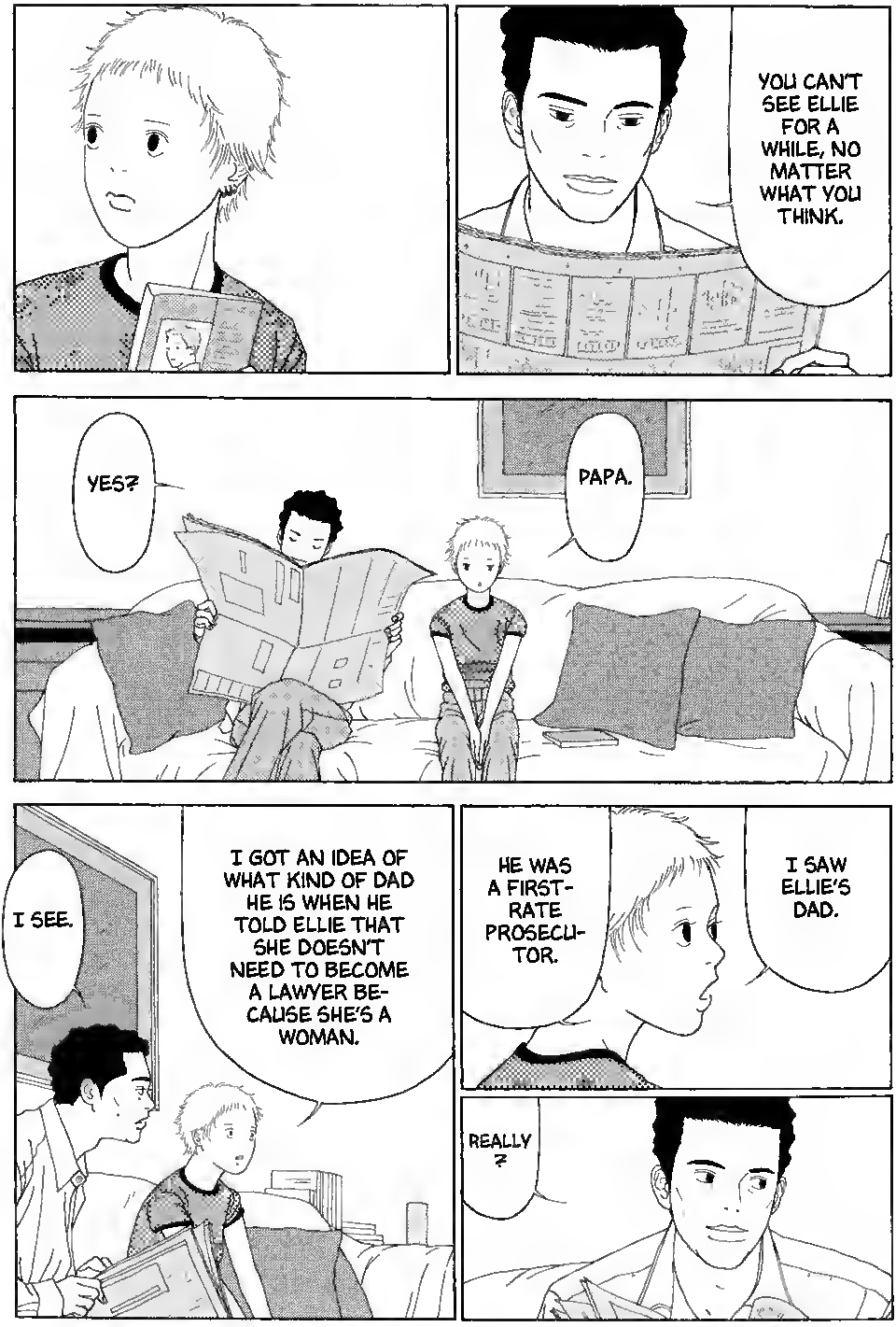
Is this true? Because there's no void. Other things can fill it during our time apart.

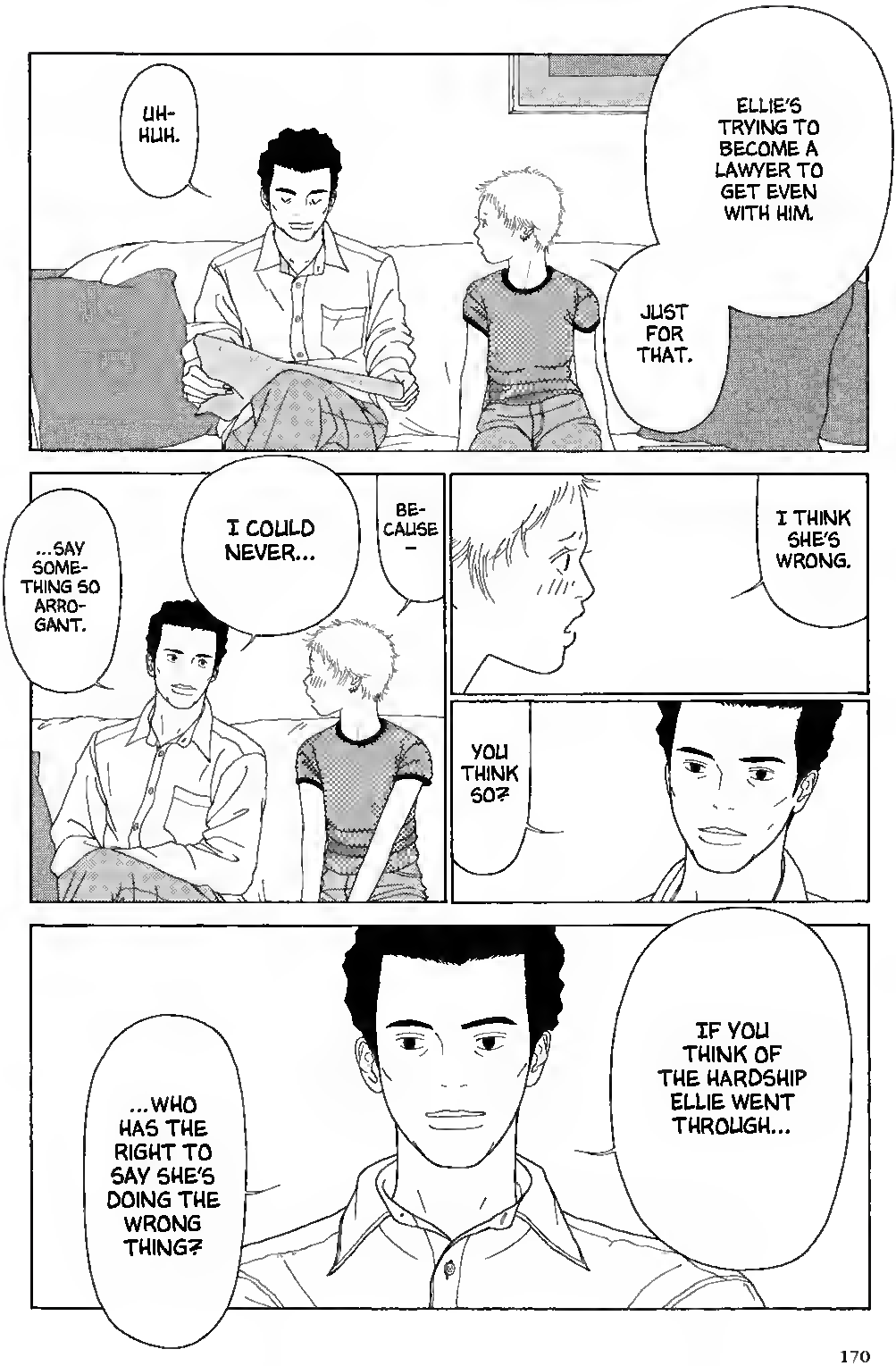



ACT AS A PROFESSIONAL TRANSLATOR AND TURN THEM INTO READABLE WORK.
SHOW ME WHEN YOU COMPLETE THREE STORIES. DON'T JUST PHONE IT IN.



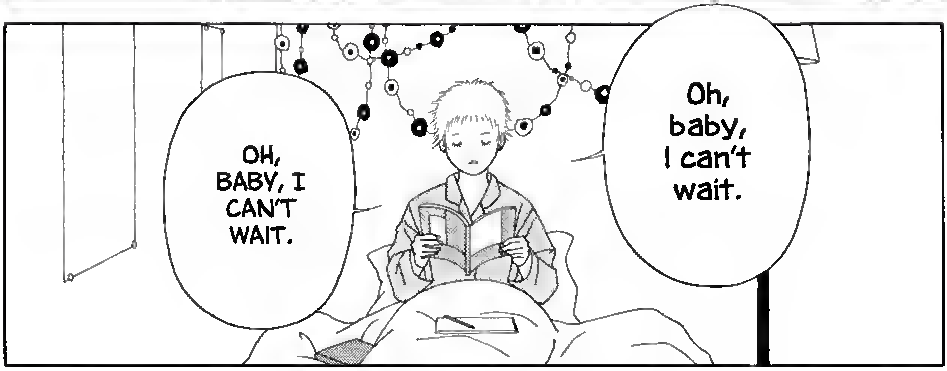


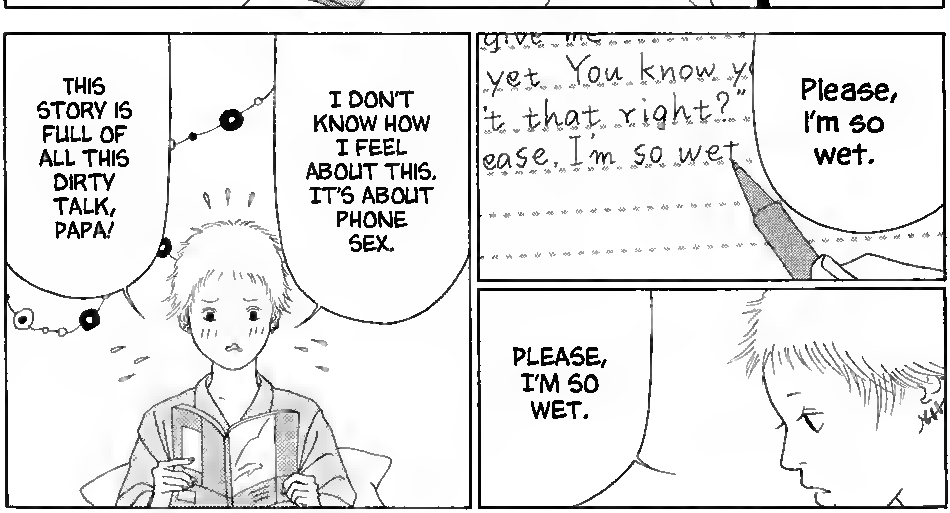

YOU CAN'T SEE ELLIE FOR A WHILE, NO MATTER WHAT YOU THINK.
PAPA.
YES?
I SAW ELLIE'S DAD.
HE WAS A FIRST-RATE PROSECUTOR.
REALLY?
I GOT AN IDEA OF WHAT KIND OF DAD HE IS WHEN HE TOLD ELLIE THAT SHE DOESN'T NEED TO BECOME A LAWYER BECAUSE SHE'S A WOMAN.
I SEE.


UH-HUH.
ELLIE'S TRYING TO BECOME A LAWYER TO GET EVEN WITH HIM.
JUST FOR THAT.
...SAY SOMETHING SO ARROGANT.
I COULD NEVER...
BECAUSE—
I THINK SHE'S WRONG.
YOU THINK SO?
IF YOU THINK OF THE HARDSHIP ELLIE WENT THROUGH...
...WHO HAS THE RIGHT TO SAY SHE'S DOING THE WRONG THING?

I KNOW. I CAN'T SAY IT, EITHER.
I CAN ONLY WISH HER LUCK IN HER STUDIES ON A POST-CARD.
WELL.
I JUST REAL-IZED...
PAPA?
...YOU'RE NOT JUST MY LITTLE ICHIKO ANY-MORE.

I haven't heard from Ellie.
It must mean she's studying hard.


OH, BABY, I CAN'T WAIT.
Oh, baby, I can't wait.


THIS STORY IS FULL OF ALL THIS DIRTY TALK, PAPA!
I DON'T KNOW HOW I FEEL ABOUT THIS. IT'S ABOUT PHONE SEX.
yet. You know y
't that right?"
ease, I'm so wet.
Please, I'm so wet.
PLEASE, I'M SO WET.

I work from the nape of your neck to your back, along the curve of your hip to your thighs. I open your legs to enter inside you.

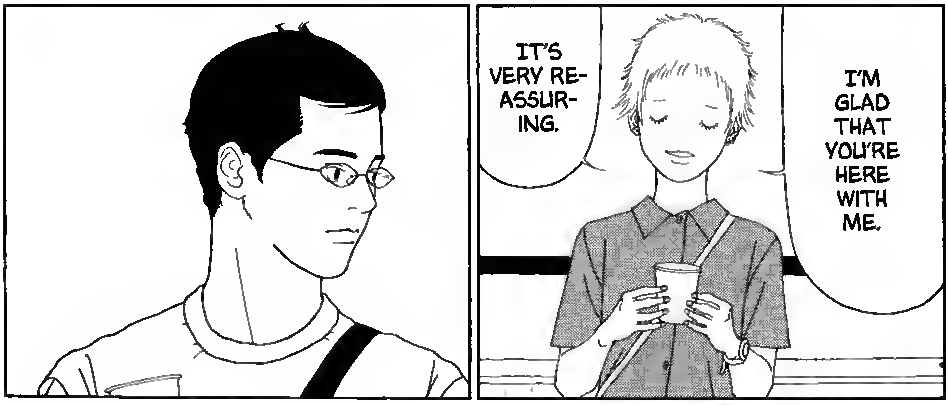
Slowly I work my hands down your body.

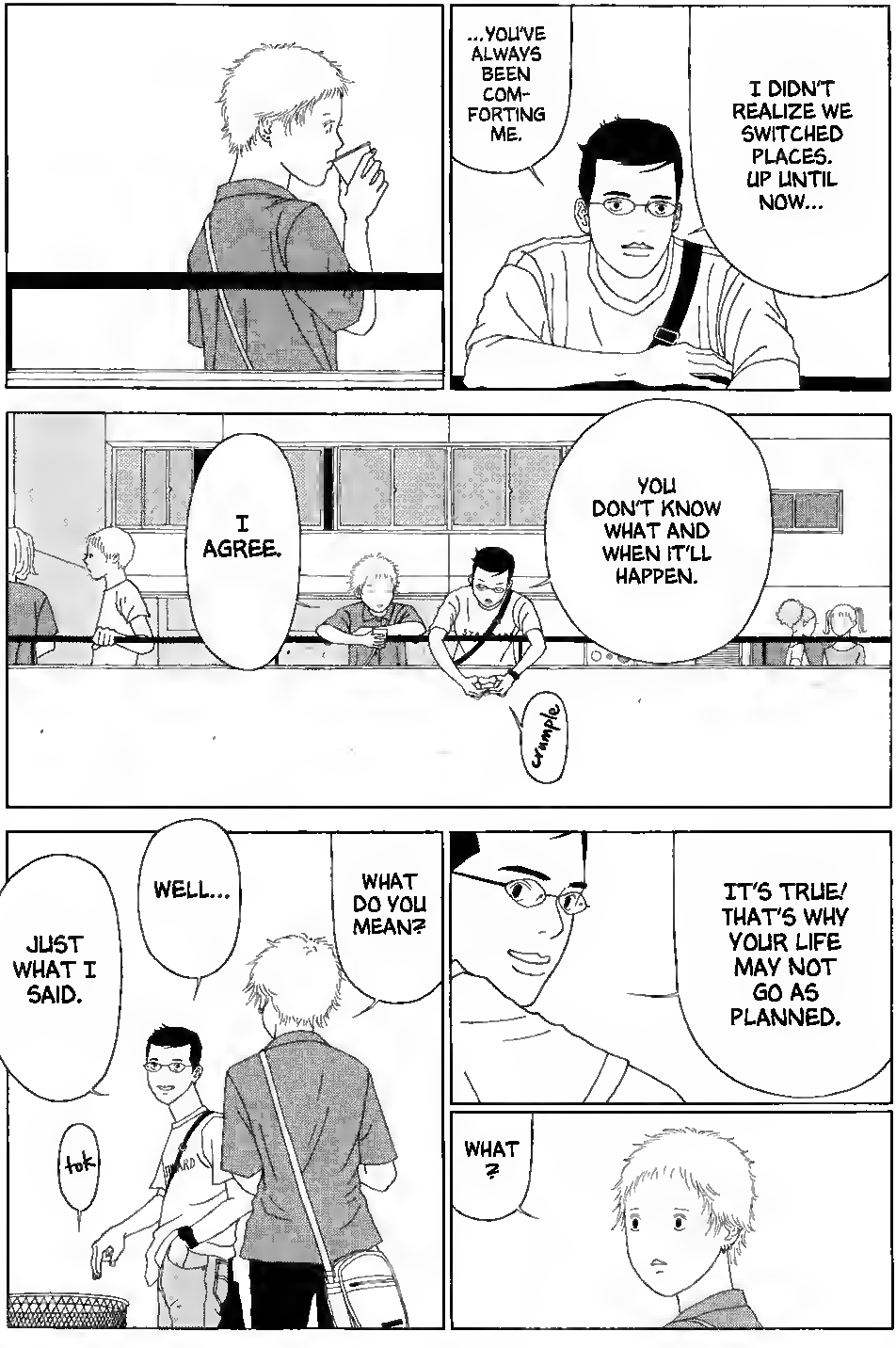
Yes, you're so hot and wet.

Ichiko.

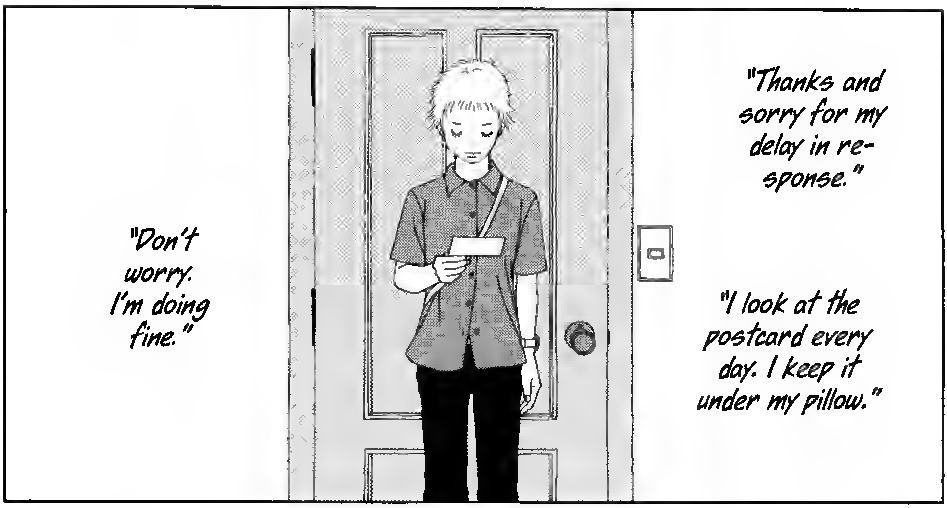
I WONDER WHY ELLIE HASN'T REPLIED.
DON'T GET YOUR HOPES UP.

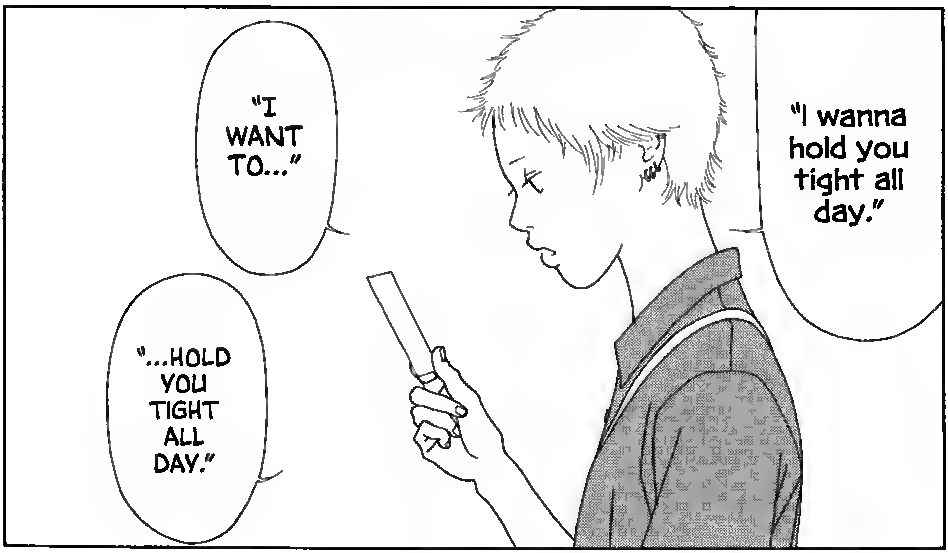
YOU SENT OUT THE POSTCARD ON YOUR OWN. DON'T EXPECT A REPLY. IT'LL ONLY MAKE YOU DE-PRESSED.
SHE'LL GET IT SOON ENOUGH.
UH-HUH.


I'M GLAD THAT YOU'RE HERE WITH ME.
IT'S VERY RE-ASSUR-ING.


...YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN COM-FORTING ME.
I DIDN'T REALIZE WE SWITCHED PLACES. UP UNTIL NOW...
I AGREE.
YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT AND WHEN IT'LL HAPPEN.
crumple
WELL...
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
JUST WHAT I SAID.
tok
IT'S TRUE! THAT'S WHY YOUR LIFE MAY NOT GO AS PLANNED.
WHAT?

I heard back from Ellie when I got home.


"Thanks and sorry for my delay in response."
"I look at the postcard every day. I keep it under my pillow."
"Don't worry. I'm doing fine."

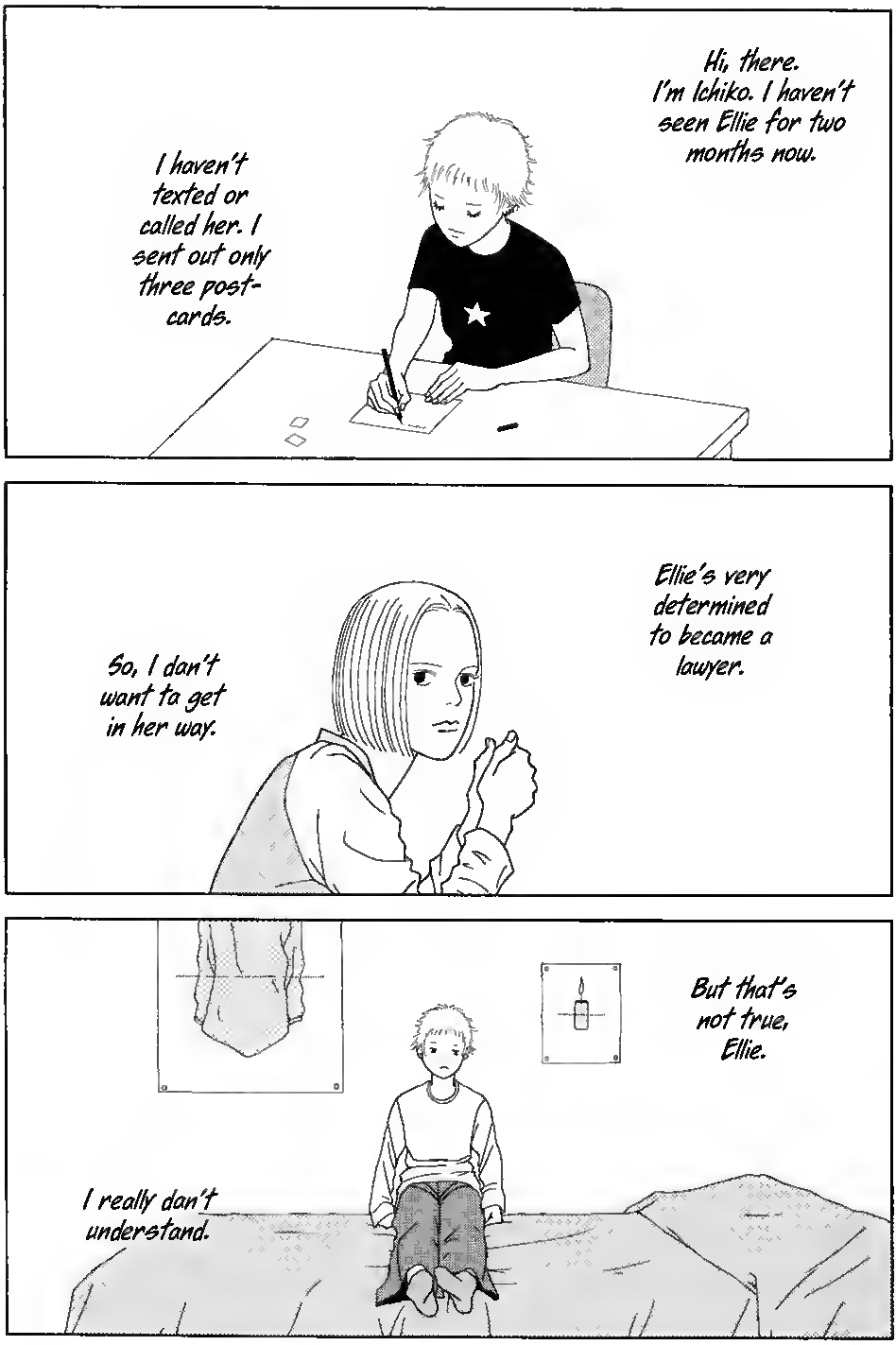


Ellie...
Come see me...

...before I stop missing you.
©Lilla Abna

Please, I can't wait.

Chapter 12: *Sweet and Spicy*


Hi, there. I'm Ichiko. I haven't seen Ellie for two months now.
I haven't texted or called her. I sent out only three post-cards.
Ellie's very determined to became a lawyer.
So, I don't want ta get in her way.
But that's not true, Ellie.
I really don't understand.

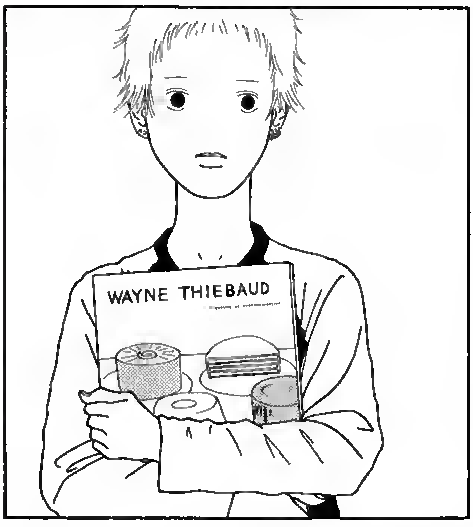
If I call you, I might end up telling you that you're wrong. It isn't cool to live your life by getting even with someone. You can never be happy that way.

How can I make you understand?

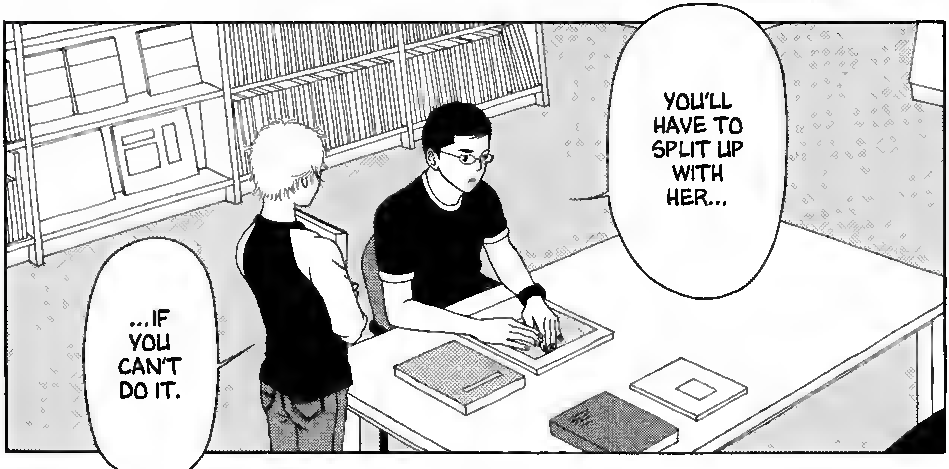
I don't want to hate you.

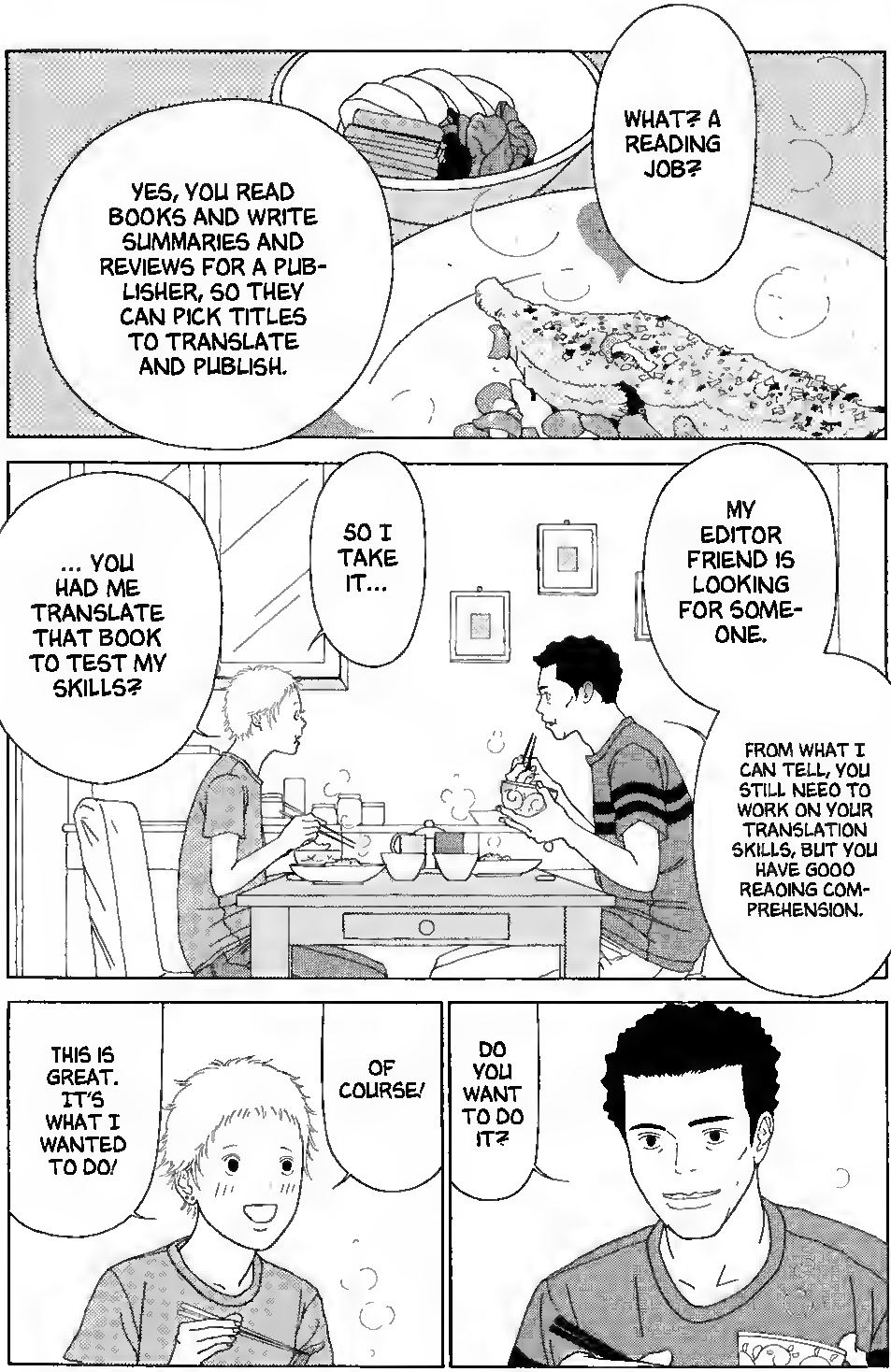
WHAT?
SORRY TO SOUND BLUNT...
...BUT I THINK YOU'RE BEING SELFISH.
...SHE MAY FIND IT REWARDING.
...BUT IF SHE LANDS THE JOB...
GETTING EVEN WITH HER FATHER MAY BE HER ONLY MOTIVE...
...YOU CAN'T STAND NOT SEEING HER.
THE BOTTOM LINE IS...
YOU MAY BE RIGHT.

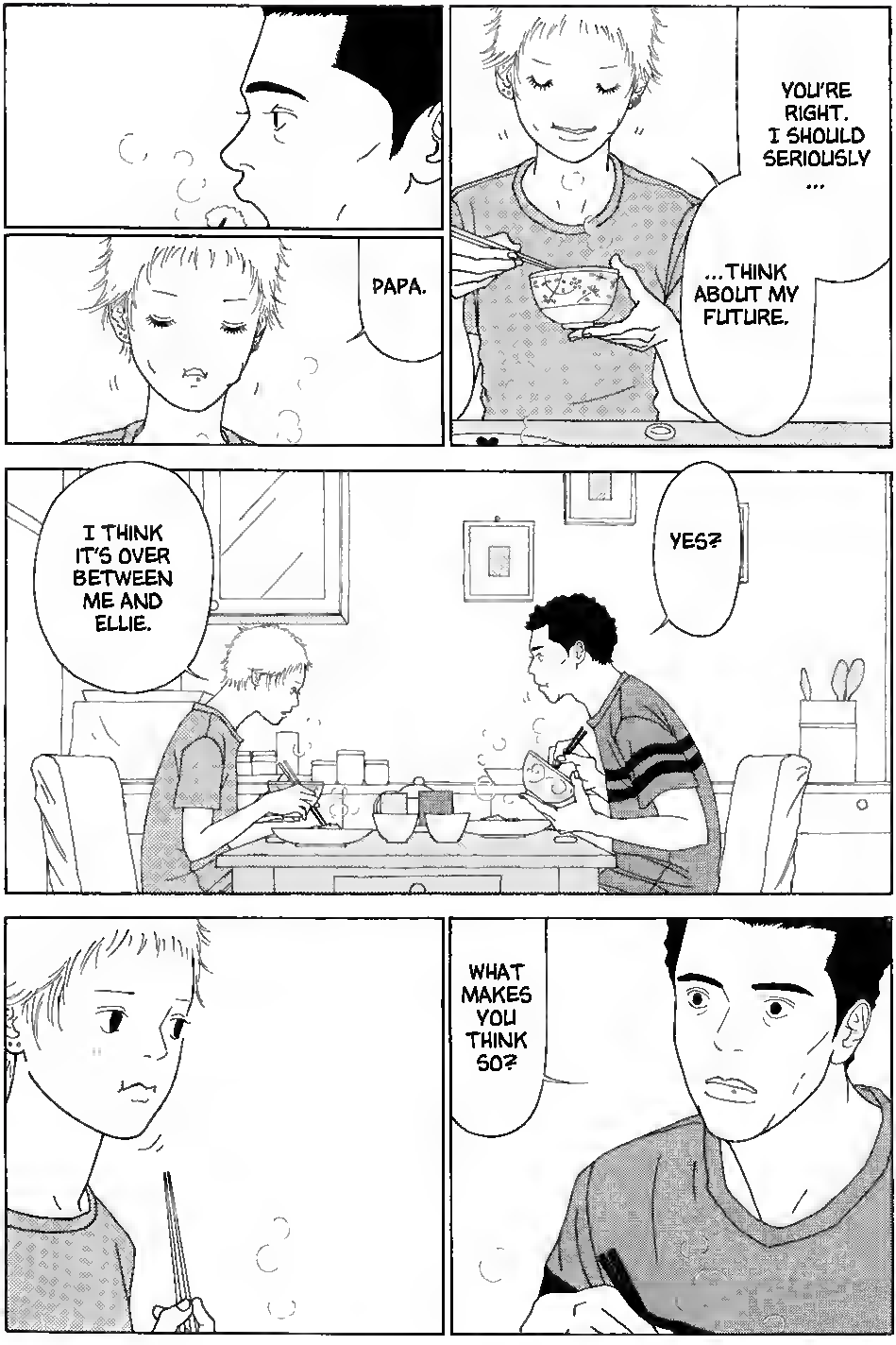
YOU'RE WRONG.
NO, I'M NOT.
IF YOU WANT TO LOVE HER...


WAYNE THIEBAUD

...I THINK YOU HAVE TO CHANGE YOUR WAY OF THINKING.

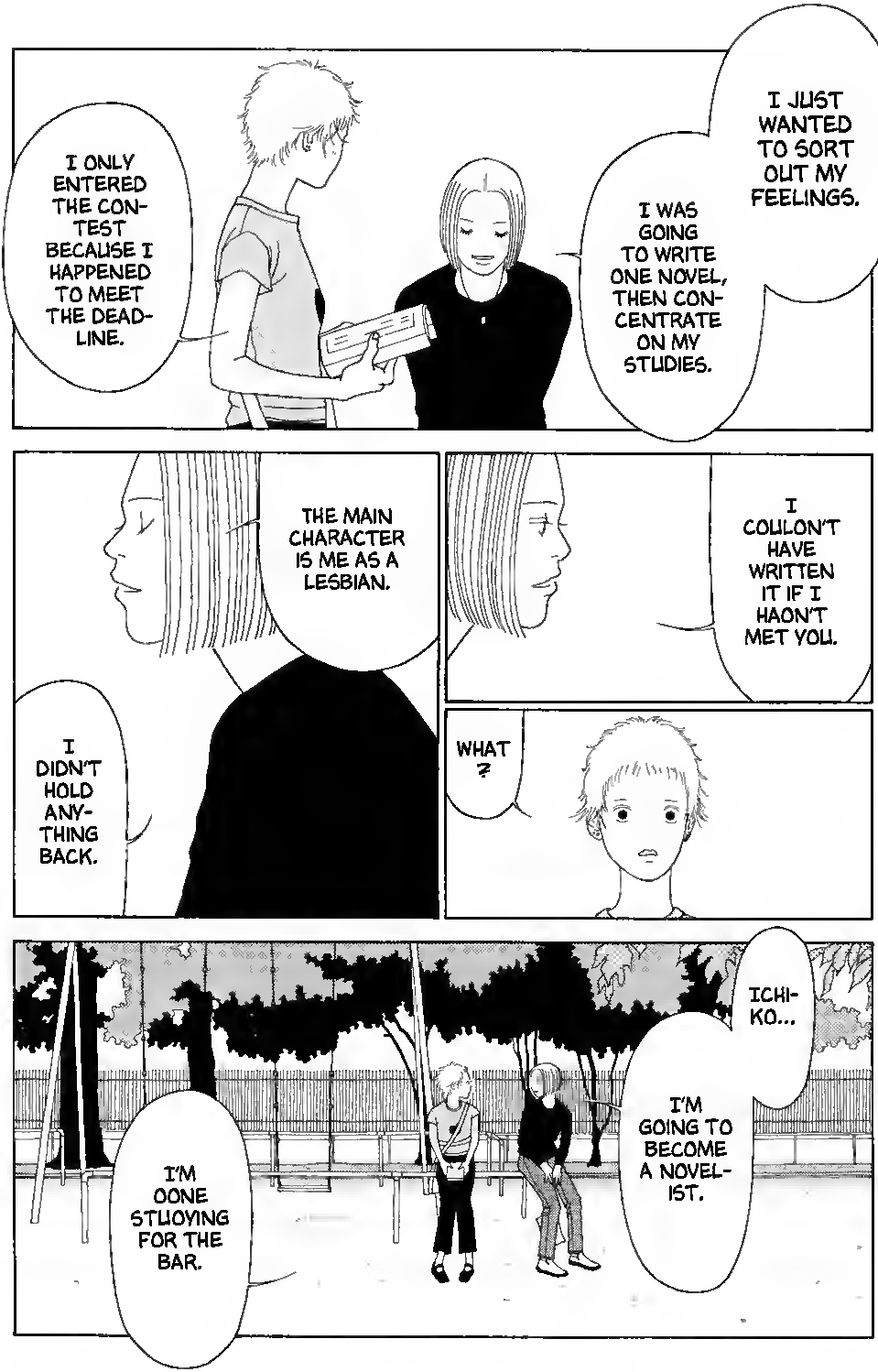

YOU'LL HAVE TO SPLIT UP WITH HER...
...IF YOU CAN'T DO IT.

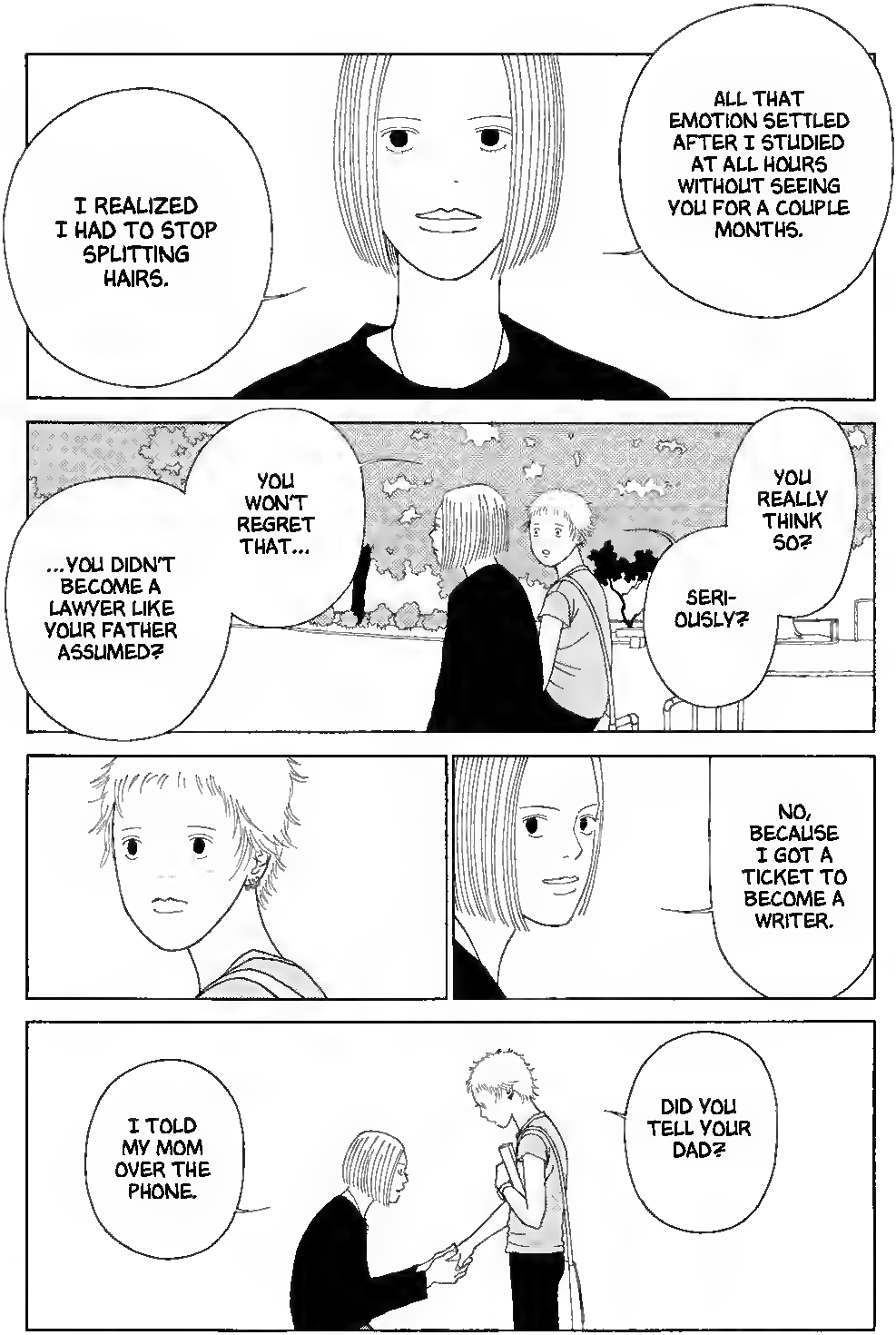

WHAT? A READING JOB?
YES, YOU READ BOOKS AND WRITE SUMMARIES AND REVIEWS FOR A PUBLISHER, SO THEY CAN PICK TITLES TO TRANSLATE AND PUBLISH.
MY EDITOR FRIEND IS LOOKING FOR SOMEONE.
SO I TAKE IT...
... YOU HAD ME TRANSLATE THAT BOOK TO TEST MY SKILLS?
FROM WHAT I CAN TELL, YOU STILL NEED TO WORK ON YOUR TRANSLATION SKILLS, BUT YOU HAVE GOOD READING COMPREHENSION.
DO YOU WANT TO DO IT?
OF COURSE!
THIS IS GREAT. IT'S WHAT I WANTED TO DO!

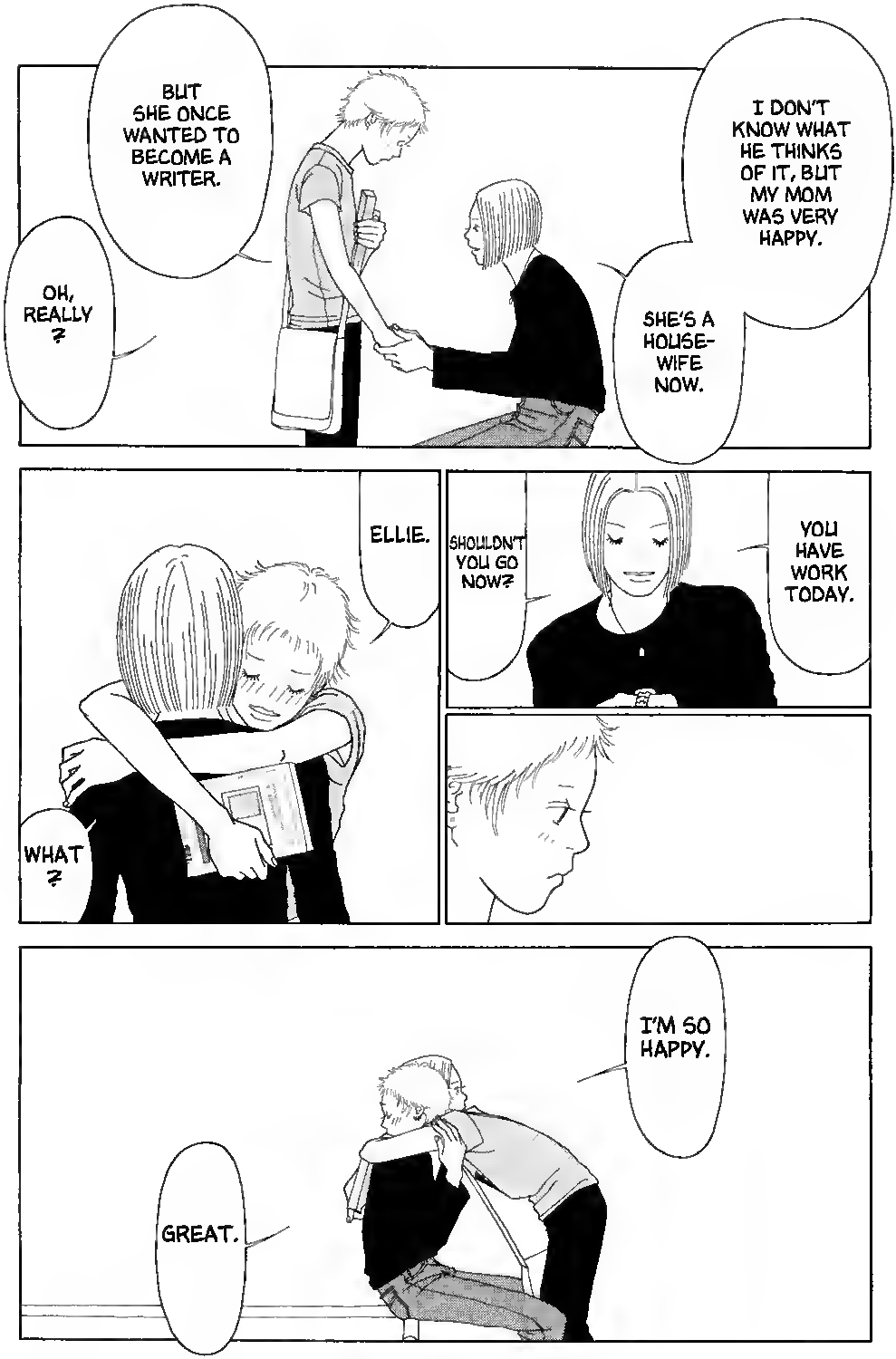

PAPA.
YOU'RE RIGHT. I SHOULD SERIOUSLY ...
...THINK ABOUT MY FUTURE.
I THINK IT'S OVER BETWEEN ME AND ELLIE.
YES?
WHAT MAKES YOU THINK SO?

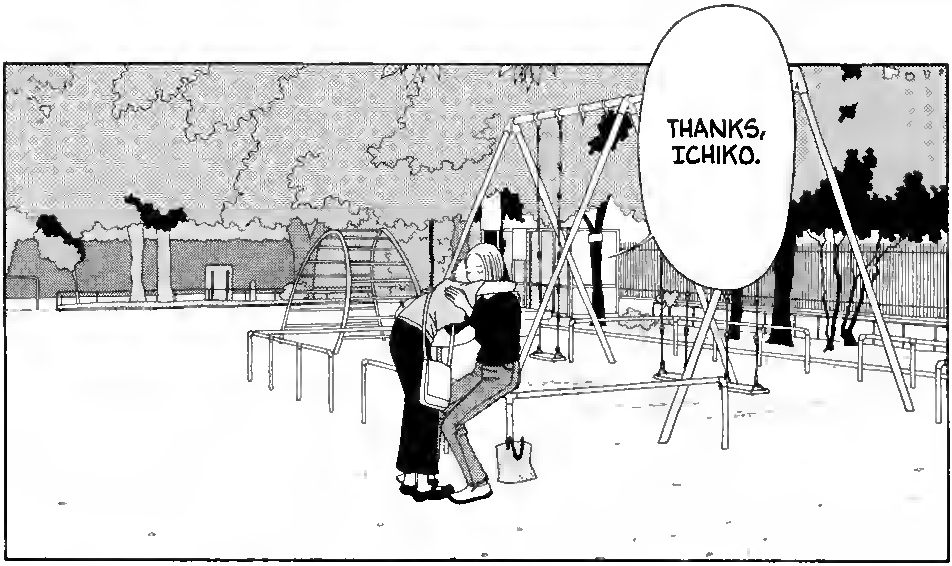
Then, Ellie suddenly asked to see me.

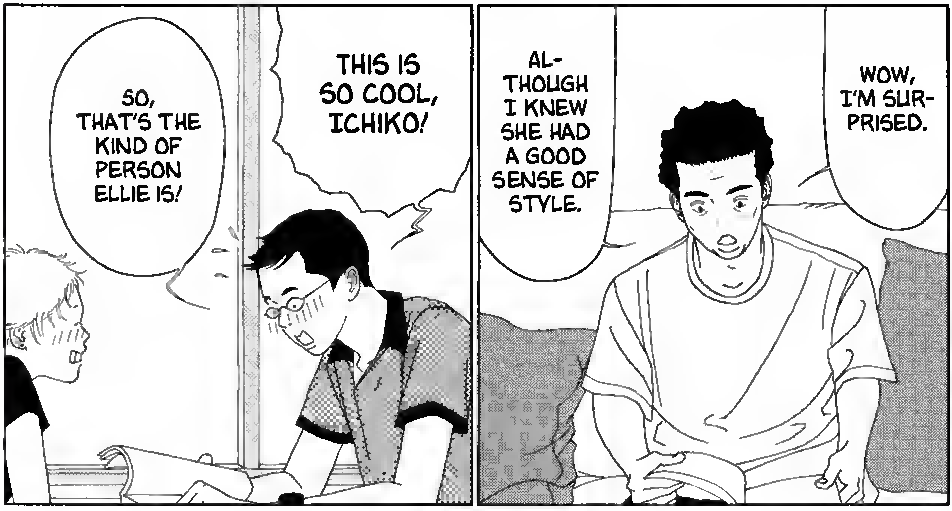
ERIKO JYO-JIMA...
...aw Writers Award
...ushi Sweet and Spicy
by Eriko Jyojima
...wamura
NEW WRITERS AWARD, SWEET AND SPICY.
HOLD IT FOR A SECOND. WHAT DO YOU MEAN, ELLIE?
BUT I DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE WRITING A NOVEL.
I NEVER TOLD YOU ABOUT IT.
I CAN'T BELIEVE I WON, EITHER.
I ALWAYS THOUGHT MY CHANCE OF WINNING WAS EVEN LESS THAN PASSING THE BAR.


I ONLY ENTERED THE CONTEST BECAUSE I HAPPENED TO MEET THE DEADLINE.
I WAS GOING TO WRITE ONE NOVEL, THEN CONCENTRATE ON MY STUDIES.
I JUST WANTED TO SORT OUT MY FEELINGS.
THE MAIN CHARACTER IS ME AS A LESBIAN.
I DIDN'T HOLD ANYTHING BACK.
I COULDN'T HAVE WRITTEN IT IF I HADN'T MET YOU.
WHAT?
I'M GOING TO BECOME A NOVELIST.
ICHIKO...
I'M GOING FOR THE BAR.


I REALIZED I HAD TO STOP SPLITTING HAIRS.
ALL THAT EMOTION SETTLED AFTER I STUDIED AT ALL HOURS WITHOUT SEEING YOU FOR A COUPLE MONTHS.
...YOU DIDN'T BECOME A LAWYER LIKE YOUR FATHER ASSUMED?
YOU WON'T REGRET THAT...
SERI-OUSLY?
YOU REALLY THINK SO?
NO, BECAUSE I GOT A TICKET TO BECOME A WRITER.
I TOLD MY MOM OVER THE PHONE.
DID YOU TELL YOUR DAD?

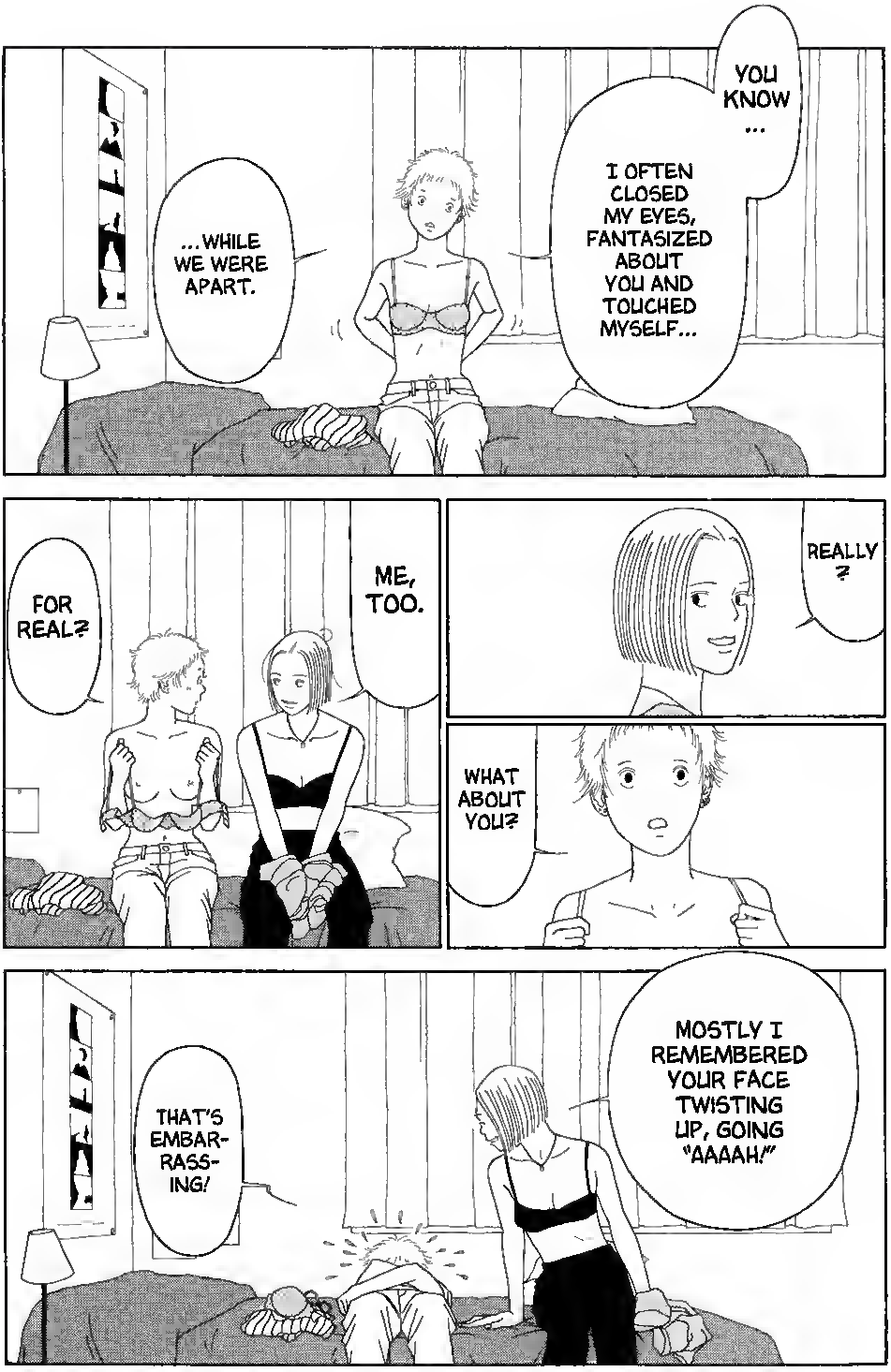

I DON'T KNOW WHAT HE THINKS OF IT, BUT MY MOM WAS VERY HAPPY.
SHE'S A HOUSE-WIFE NOW.
BUT SHE ONCE WANTED TO BECOME A WRITER.
OH, REALLY ?
YOU HAVE WORK TODAY.
SHOULDN'T YOU GO NOW?
ELLIE.
WHAT ?
I'M SO HAPPY.
GREAT.

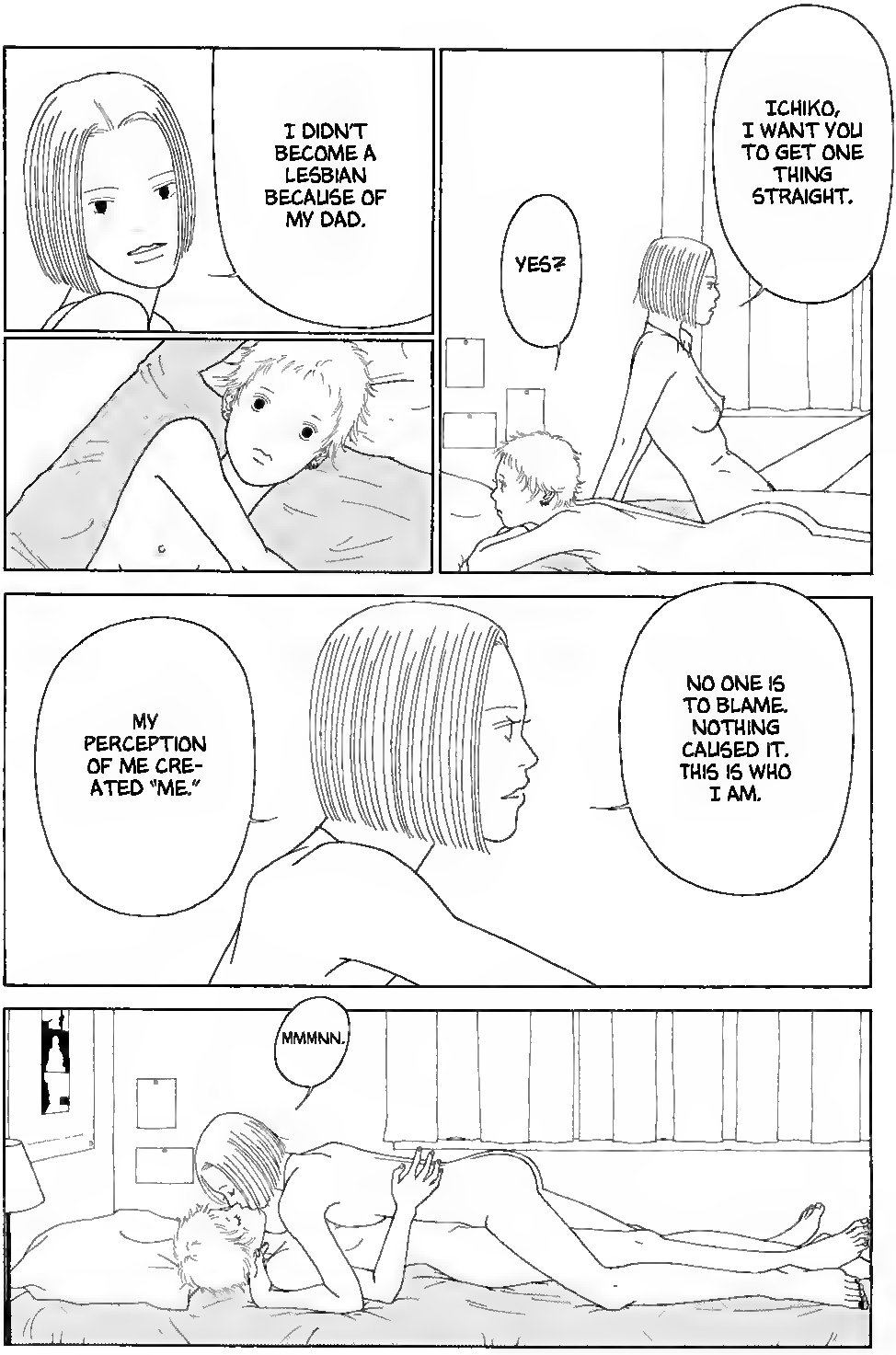


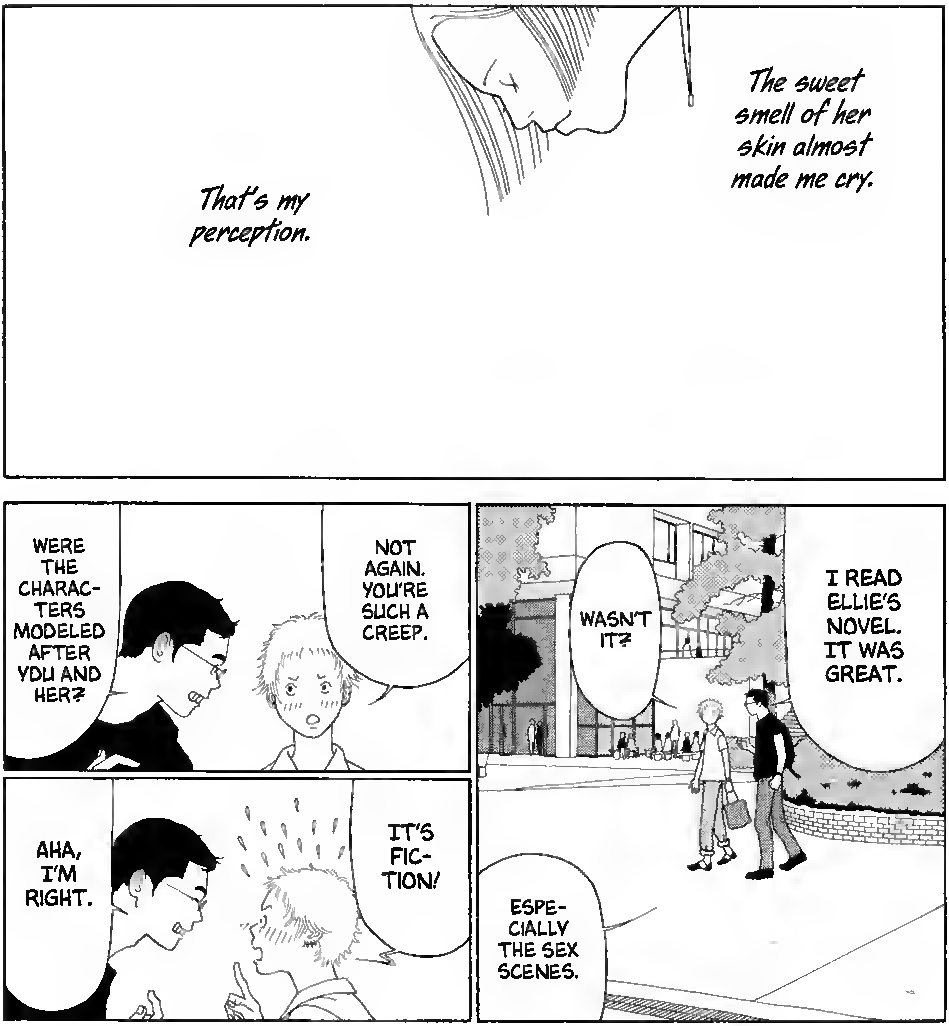


God, I'm so grateful to you.

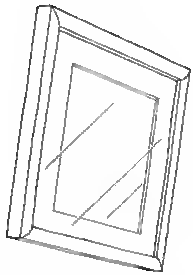
I really am!!


YOU KNOW ...
I OFTEN CLOSED MY EYES, FANTASIZED ABOUT YOU AND TOUCHED MYSELF...
...WHILE WE WERE APART.
REALLY?
ME, TOO.
FOR REAL?
WHAT ABOUT YOU?
MOSTLY I REMEMBERED YOUR FACE TWISTING UP, GOING "AAAAH!"
THAT'S EMBARRASSING!


I DIDN'T BECOME A LESBIAN BECAUSE OF MY DAD.
ICHIKO, I WANT YOU TO GET ONE THING STRAIGHT.
YES?
MY PERCEPTION OF ME CREATED "ME."
NO ONE IS TO BLAME. NOTHING CAUSED IT. THIS IS WHO I AM.
MMMNN.


The sweet smell of her skin almost made me cry.
That's my perception.
WERE THE CHARAC-TERS MODELED AFTER YOU AND HER?
NOT AGAIN. YOU'RE SUCH A CREEP.
AHA, I'M RIGHT.
IT'S FIC-TION!
I READ ELLIE'S NOVEL. IT WAS GREAT.
WASN'T IT?
ESPE-CIALLY THE SEX SCENES.
You really...
...can't predict the future at all.

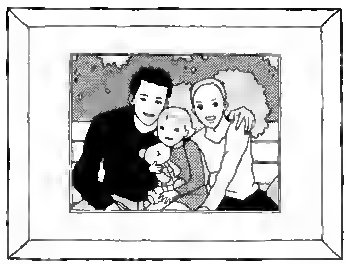
Mama, Papa...



I won't deny the natural feelings inside of me, even if someone is critical.

But I'll be who I am no matter what happens.

...say this with pride...



I'll always...

I'm glad I was born.

I love my life!

THE END

Afterword

Four years after my debut, I quit drawing manga for a variety of reasons. When I tried to pick up my pen again a couple years later, I couldn't recall how I created my plot, laid out the panels or finished my storyboards. I tried in vain to reread my old work many times, too. I went back to work, feeling my way through things like a novice. Those things remained forgotten even after I relearned my job. I could have made peace with it, but I didn't. I wasn't able to move on for years and years.

Ichiko suddenly appeared in my mind while I was reading a book by a female American writer to kill time. Then, Ellie appeared and Ichiko's parents popped out. Once these characters lined up, the first chapter of Love My Life came to my mind. I came to a realization when I completed the first sixteen pages. I unexpectedly grasped the feel of the way I created manga during that period I lost a long time ago. I'll never be satisfied with my completed work, but Love My Life became my special piece of work. I believe this was where I began my career.

Lastly, I always want to thank my editor, Mariko Yorozu-san. I want to take this opportunity to give my thanks to Yukio Hoshino-san, who did the bookbinding. And I thank the readers, who supported the serialization in Feel Young Magazine, and the readers, who purchased this book, from my heart. See you again.

July 29, 2001 Ebine Yamaji

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LOVE MY LIFE

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